Defence Science Centre

Collaborative Research Grants

**Applicant Guidelines**

**Round 7 - 2025**

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1. Introduction

The DSC Collaborative Research Grant (CRG) is a competitive program to enable the research and industry sector to collaborate and focus their work on the development of advanced Defence-relevant and asymmetric capabilities in key technological areas as outlined in the [2024 National Defence Strategy, 2024 Integrated Investment Program](https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2024-national-defence-strategy-2024-integrated-investment-program) and the [Defence IS&T Strategy](https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/accelerating-asymmetric-advantage-delivering-more-together).

1. Requirements
   1. Opportunity Outline

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Information | Details |
| Total funding available | $50k to $200k |
| Initial Technology Readiness Level (TRL) range | TRL 2 to TRL 5 |
| Collaboration requirement | Team must include a DSC member university and a WA industry partner |
| Assessment process | Single stage Request for Proposal with technical review |
| Call for Proposals opens | 22 September 2025 |
| Call for Proposals close | 5pm, 21 November 2025 (AWST) |
| Project duration | 12-18 months |

All applications are to be made via the provided application form on the [DSC Grants Programs webpage](https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-jobs-tourism-science-and-innovation/defence-science-centre-grants-programs). Applications must be submitted to [DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au) before the closing date.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Event | Date |
| Call for Proposals Announced | 22 September 2025 |
| Call for Abstracts open | 22 September 2025 |
| Information Briefing | 25 September 2025 |
| Call for Abstracts closes | 5pm, 17 October 2025 |
| Call for Proposal closes | 5pm, 21 November 2025 |
| Evaluation of Proposals (by DSC and Defence) | 4 December 2025 |
| Successful Team(s) notified | January 2026 |
| Contract award | To be defined during contract negotiations |
| Final Project Delivery | To be defined during contract negotiations |

* 1. Eligibility Criteria

Projects must be led by a DSC member university and should aim to maximise collaboration across industry partners and other Australian Defence Science and Universities Network (ADSUN) universities. The lead university must submit the application on behalf of all project partners and will be the party to the funding agreement.

To be eligible for CRG funds, the industry partner must either:

1. hold an Australian Business Number (ABN).
2. be registered as a company or trust based in Western Australia; or
3. hold an ABN outside Western Australia but collaborate with a Western Australia DSC university or a Western Australia based industry partner.

The industry partner must not be exempt from income tax.

The CRG project should have reached TRL level 2 ([DSTG definitions](https://www.dst.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/basic_pages/documents/TRL%20Explanations_1.pdf)) to be considered and should define a clear pathway to increase the TRL by a minimum of 1 level (i.e. 3 -> 4).

The purpose of these grants is to support technology development to readiness levels so that they are appropriate for development by either commercial industry or into a Defence capability (for example, via an Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA) mission). The project should outline a potential transition pathway into this capability.

All project participants must be citizens of Five Eyes Alliance countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States), NATO member countries, or permanent Australian residents.

Individual researchers may participate in only one application.

Applicants can contact [DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au) with an queries or requests for further information.

To be considered eligible, an application must be received by the closing date. Applications will not be accepted after this time.

* 1. DSC Member universities
* University of Western Australia
* Curtin University
* Edith Cowan University
* Murdoch University

1. Research Themes
   1. Description

This year, the CRG grants focuses on the theme of Trusted Autonomy in all Domains. Trusted Autonomous Systems is one of the six Defence IST priorities. These systems are enabled by artificial intelligence and machine learning models and operate across both machine-machine and machine-human interfaces.

The strategy describes an autonomous capability advantage as the ability “*to operate reliably and accurately, at the speed of relevance, with minimal human supervisio*n”. Key areas of focus include:

* Resilience,
* Robustness,
* Reliability,
* Ability to learn and explain courses of action,
* Verification and validation models,
* Interoperability across platforms and domains with allies.

Interoperability, integration transferability, and modularity are essential for any application. Successful applicants should demonstrate not only alignment with the topics below but also compatibility with public standards (not necessarily military standards at this TRL). Proposals that are limited to a single platform or that would struggle to integrate into a broader force should be avoided.

The National Defence Strategy and Integrated Investment Program emphasize the need for an *integrated, focused force*. One that unifies all five domains of maritime, land, air, space, and cyber to focus on addressing Australia’s strategic risks. As the Defence IS&T ecosystems grows and generates innovative solutions, it must be relevant across all these domains.

As such, when considering the topics below applicants should not be constrained by domain. The CRG process will consider applications as aligned with the topic regardless of which domain they address. For example, “cyber security of autonomous systems”, “resilient C2 of space assets” and “automated maritime sensing” are all valid topics.

* 1. Theme

The theme for DSC 2025 CRG is **Trusted Autonomy in All Domains.**

The **Research Topics (numbered)**, Challenges (lettered) and Problems (roman numeral) are:

**1)** **Intelligent sensing**

a. Dynamic information exploitation

i. Sensor fusion

ii. Correlation discovery

iii. Edge processing

iv. Tactical re-programming

v. Auto-cueing

b. Sensor processing (including but not limited to image)

i. Detection of platforms, threats or environmental information

ii. Classification of novel platforms or threats

iii. Identification of novel platforms or threats including friend/foe categorisation

**2)** **Human/Machine teaming**

a. Multi-agent systems at scale / Collective autonomy

i. One-to-many command and control

ii. Novel schemas of control that incorporate cross-domain and heterogeneous systems

b. Autonomous tasking

i. Nuanced, mission-aligned decision support

ii. Agent-to-agent command

c. Trust in system

i. Self-monitoring and system health

ii. Appropriate reliance structures accounting for both over- and under- trust

iii. Auditable decisions

d. Adaptive autonomy

i. Aware and designed for operator state and level of skill

ii. Edge autonomy

iii. Multi-coalition partner coord/control/teaming

**3)** **Enabling infrastructure**

a. Communication

i. Diverse, resilient, high bandwidth communication

ii. Resilient, low bandwidth communication in challenging environments

iii. Mesh networks including bridging to other protocols

b. Physical and cyber security

i. Cyber detect/responds/recover systems with low SWP overlays

ii. Encrypted communication & storage

iii. Physical security of autonomous systems including tamper management and zero-memory systems

c. DevSecOps

i. Novel approaches for iterative development of secure systems

1. Application

Complete the [CRG application Form](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/defence-science-centre-collaborative-research-grant-2025-application-form) and submit to DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au prior to 5:00 PM, 21 November 2025 AWST.

* 1. Proposal abstract

DSTG staff with technical expertise are uniquely positioned to give rapid and topical advice on impact for Defence, project feasibility and alignment with specific goals. As such, if a 200-400 word proposal abstract is provided to DSC (via the [dsc@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:dsc@dpc.wa.gov.au) email) prior to 5:00pm, 17 October 2025. DSC will review the abstract and provide it to DSTG expert reviewers for guidance and feedback. A response will be sent within 2 weeks of submission to DSC, although we cannot guarantee DSTG expert responses.

* 1. Application details

Application must include the following:

**Lead Institution and Researcher** –The lead researcher must be either from an academic institution that is a member of DSC or from a WA-based industry partner.

**Project Title**

**Project FoR Code(s)**

**Theme and Topic addressed** –Alignment with the priorities and topics as listed in Research Themes.

**Project Timeframe with milestones/outputs**

**Project Description:** –no more than 1000 words

The project descriptions should include

* Project overview,
* Background including existing work by the team
* Expected results

**Collaboration**–Details of any planned collaboration on the project should be listed. Theunique roles and responsibility of each collaborator should be clearly described. Applications from multiple collaborators are more attractive than those from single entities and this should be considered when establishing a team. Any engagement of support from Defence, such as from the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) or uniformed Defence member should also be included.

**Collaboration Endorsement** –A letter of support from each collaborating institutions should be attached with the application. This should also define any information that must be treated as confidential.

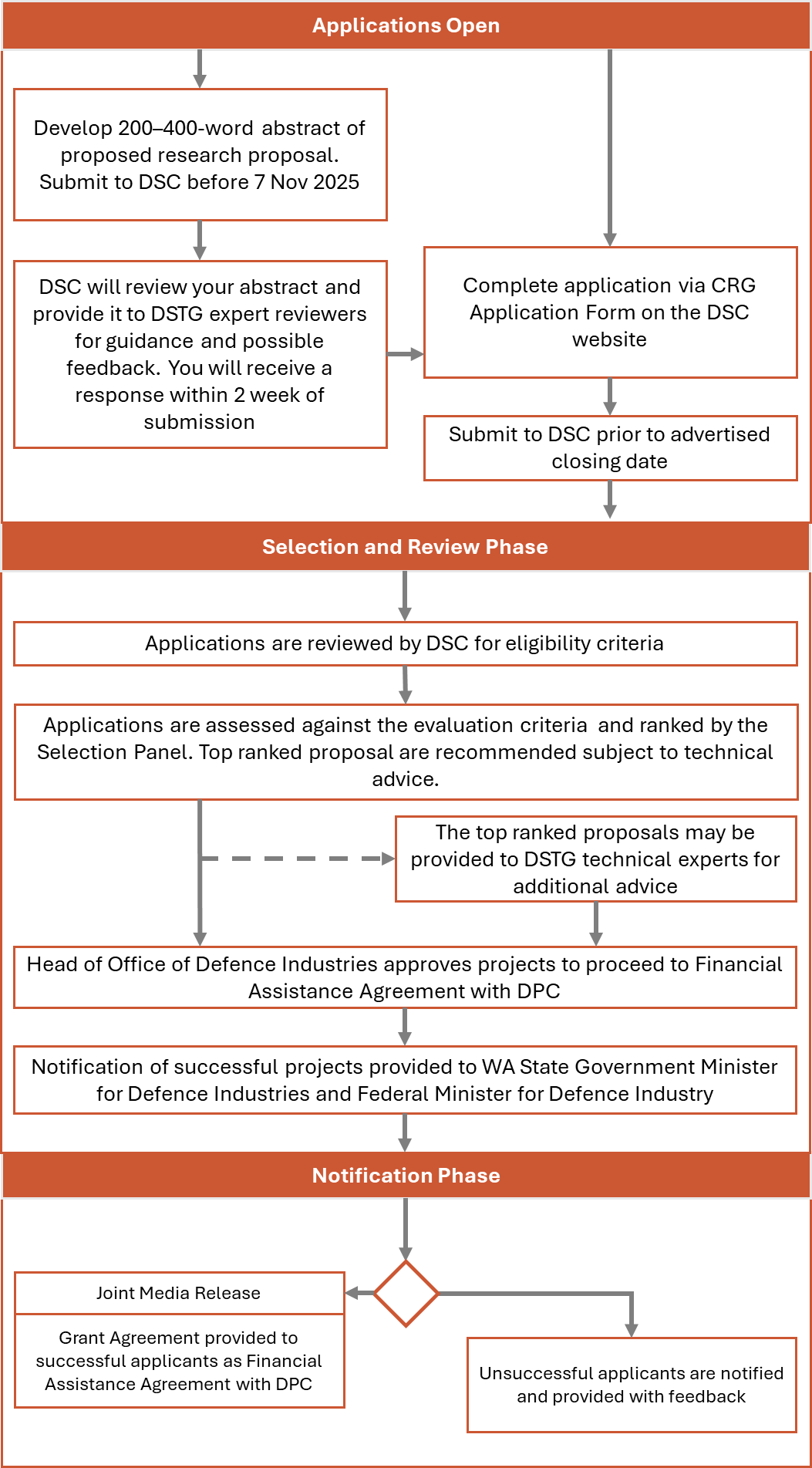
**Impact for Defence** – Who will benefit from the research and how they will benefit, including a demonstration of how the research will address critical challenges and needs of the Defence.

**Funding and Co-investment** –Cost to develop the project within the 12–18-month period. This should also describe the cash, in-kind and other contributions from the lead institution and the collaborating institutions.

**Project Feasibility** – This should include broad milestones and timeline, planned research expenditure and any approvals required.

**Intellectual Property (IP) Arrangement** – Description of the planned IP arrangements that all project partners have agreed to in relation to ownership, licencing and potential future commercialisation opportunities of all Background and Project IP

1. **Application process**



* 1. Getting help

The DSC strongly advises that you contact your defence research university liaison for assistance in completing your application. The contact details of the DSC-member defence research liaison are as follows:

**Curtin University**

Gary Hale - Chief Security Officer & Director Defence & Space Research

Phone: 08 9266 1448

Email: [defence@curtin.edu.au](mailto:defence@curtin.edu.au)

**Edith Cowan University**

Michele Clement – Director, Defence Engagement

Phone: 08 6304 5194

Email: [defence@ecu.edu.au](mailto:defence@ecu.edu.au)

**Murdoch University**

André deSouza- Director of Operations, Commercialisation and Defence

Phone: 08 9360 1655

Email: Andre.deSouza@murdoch.edu.au

**University of Western Australia**

Gia Parish – Director, Defence and Security Institute

Phone: 08 6488 3390

Email: [defencedirector@uwa.edu.au](mailto:defencedirector@uwa.edu.au)

If you require further assistance or guidance to complete your application or support to connect with potential collaboration partners, please email the team at [DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:DSC@dpc.wa.gov.au). We will endeavour to respond to your email within two working days. For urgent assistance please call DSC on (08) 6277 3013

1. Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against information and evidence provided in relation to the following selection criteria.

* 1. Alignment

Project proposals should be aligned with the theme and topic to be addressed and laid out in the ‘Research Themes’ above at clause 3.

* 1. Collaboration

Collaboration builds resilience and depth to a research proposal and addresses the intent of the DSC to support cross-disciplinary research and build academic and industry communities.

You should demonstrate this by describing:

* Any university staff on the research team, preferably from more than one DSC member university.
* Any industry partner as part of the research team, preferably Western Australian-based.
* Any engagement of support from Defence, such as from the DSTG or uniformed Defence member (where Protected Identity constraints allow).
* Co-contributions in cash or in-kind from team members.
* Unique roles and responsibilities the team members will bring to the project.

Applications with significant contribution from industry or Defence collaborators named within the application will be considered more favourably.

* 1. Feasibility

Feasibility assesses the ability of your proposed team, funding, and schedule to achieve the scope of the proposed project. It is not a strict assessment of the research topic, but rather an assessment of the likelihood that the project outcomes will be achieved.

You should demonstrate this by describing:

* The experience of the collaborators and their track record in achieving successful research outcomes in relevant timeframes
* Mitigating factors to reduce the perceived technical risks
* Previous risk-mitigation measures which have been conducted to mature the TRL to date
* Your access requirements for specialist resources, platforms, infrastructure, equipment, or personnel and how you perceived this will be enabled
* Broad expected milestones.
  1. Impact

Impact is a subjective assessment and considers how your application enhances Australian Defence Force (ADF) operational capability and secures strategic advantage and/or growth of sovereign industry capability.

You should demonstrate this by describing:

* Anticipated project outcomes
* How the research will address critical challenges and needs of Defence
* How the project and collaboration partners will influence the change
* Identification of potential commercialisation pathways.

1. Selection process
   1. Selection and review process

Applicants are required to submit proposals using the application form template (see ‘Application’ above at clause 4). Applicants are allowed to include documents that provide evidence to support their proposal. The reviewers are expected to assess the proposal based only on the application and supporting documents.

Proposals will be distributed to a selection panel composed of reviewers who will score the proposal against specific criteria and provide an objective appraisal of the proposal against these criteria. An assessment template is provided, and reviewers are asked to assess only against the specific criteria. The purpose of these criteria is to support consistency across various applicants, research domains and reviewers.

Reviewers are asked to apply judgment when assessing science excellence and impact relative to the research stage and the area of impact.

Reviewers will be required to agree to confidentiality terms. Reviewers must not correspond with applicants or interested parties regarding the proposal during, or after, the review process.

Where possible, reviewers should provide explanatory text to support their ratings; this can include references to supporting key evidence such as scientific publications, strategic guidance documents, and patent information. Reviewers should ensure that their comments support the score and fairly reflect the assessment, and are accurate, professional, and honest. Reviewers are asked to rate the confidence of their assessment based on their expertise (e.g. Defence, Industry, Academia, Government).

* 1. Selection Panel Composition

The selection panel is drawn from State Government, DSTG, university representatives and Defence subject matter experts.

The selection panel may also seek additional advice from independent technical experts.

* + 1. Conflicts of Interest

DSC will attempt to select reviewers with no conflict of interest. Any conflicts of interest for the Selection Panel Committee will be declared and managed during the assessment process, which might include members of the Assessment Committee abstaining from assessing some proposals. If you are aware of any potential conflicted parties, please identify them in the application form.

1. Successful grant applications
   1. Grant Agreement

The terms and conditions of this opportunity will be listed in the CRG Grant Agreement (also known as the CRG Financial Assistance Agreement). These terms are non-negotiable and will be provided to successful applicants upon conclusion of the assessment phase. The finalised agreement will be sent to the successful applicants. After being notified of the award and receiving the final agreement, it is expected that successful applicants will execute the finalised agreement without delay to expedite the commencement and delivery of projects.

* 1. Payment

Payment of the requested funds will be settled in two instalments:

1. 80% on signing of the CRG Grant Agreement and provision of a tax invoice for this amount
2. 20% upon the conclusion of the project term and provision of a Completion Report.
   * 1. Use of funds

Funding is awarded on a competitive basis subject to prioritisation against the selection criteria and available funding. Funding will be in the form of a cash contribution. Funds awarded by DSC for the project will be transferred in full to the lead organisation in accordance with the CRG Grant Agreement. The lead organisation will then be responsible for managing the funds in accordance with the CRG Grant Agreement.

Funds must be used to directly support the research project described in the application form and in accordance with the CRG Grant Agreement. Funds must be spent by the DSC member university or industry partner. Funds may be used to pay for:

* Direct salary costs for researchers working on the project including chief investigators (not preferred), early career researchers, research assistants etc. Use of the funds for chief investigator salaries must be specifically justified and is subject to approval by the Director, DSC.
* On-cost salary expenses up to a maximum of 30% of direct salary costs and consistent with the university or company policy. On-costs must be itemised in the application and can only include the following items: superannuation, payroll tax, payroll tax on superannuation, workers compensation, long service leave, and maternity leave. Applicants must submit their on-cost salary expenses itemised by each category as an attachment to the application form.
* Stipends or top-ups for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students working on the project. However, given the term of the projects (12-18 months), budget line items for PhD stipends must be specifically justified and are subject to approval by the Director, DSC.
* Project equipment, software, material and consumables. Funding will not be provided for equipment and consumables purchased by the industry partner, considered to be for broad general use or already held by the university.
* Researchers’ travel costs that are essential to undertake the project, excluding conference travel costs

Funds cannot be used for conference fees, entertainment costs, professional membership fees, professional development courses, visas, teaching relief, publication costs or other indirect costs.

* 1. Reporting

The project timeline and milestones are outlined in the CRG Grant Agreement and are to be confirmed with the DSC and the Lead Researcher prior to commencement.

The reporting requirements for successful applicants to the Collaborative Research Grant are:

* **Activity Reports**. Every 3 months or within 2 weeks of the completion of milestone activity as specified in the CRG Grant Agreement.
* **Completion Report**. Within 2 months of the completion of the project term.
* **Final presentation.** A short showcase of project outcomes. Presented within 2 months of the completion of the project term.
* **Financial Report**. Statement of income and expenditure of project funds, submitted in conjunction with the Completion Report.

Standard reporting templates will be provided as enclosures to the Grant Agreement.

* 1. Intellectual Property

Ownership of intellectual property developed using the funds will be retained by the successful applicants.

**The Lead Institution and Researcher** is responsible for ensuring that any legal agreements and Intellectual Property arrangements that may be needed to support collaboration with their project partners are established before finalising the CRG Grant Agreement.

Where there is an Australian Department of Defence contribution to a project, applicants may be required to grant a licence to the Commonwealth to use project intellectual property for Commonwealth purposes.

* 1. Security

Eligible activities under this grant may have national security implications. Project participants should consider implications of the proposed project and identify and manage any risks, particularly relating to export controls, foreign interference and technology transfer.

If the outcome of the CRG has the potential to be classified, or if classified inputs or discussions are needed to complete the work, then all team members undertaking CRG activity must be willing to undergo a security assessment if requested and, at a minimum, obtain a Baseline security clearance; noting that some projects may require higher level clearances, depending on the scope. Unless involved in unclassified aspects of a potential project, personnel involved must hold (or be able to obtain) an appropriate security clearance commensurate with the nature of the proposed project

The DSC does not require a personal security clearance when applying for the CRG. However, you should discuss this requirement with your defence research university liaison (see ‘Getting Help’) as to any internal university policy regarding personnel checks when applying for national security-related projects.

If your application is successful, the Lead Applicant in consultation with the defence research university liaison, must indicate in the CRG Grant Agreement how they intend to reasonably protect the proposed research, which may include (examples only):

* AS4811 screening of all research personnel
* National Security Clearance to the required protection level
* use of certified research ICT system.
  1. Media and promotion

Successful grant recipients may be requested to feature as part of the Department’s media release announcing the successful applications into this round of Collaborative Research Grants.