1.1 The University of Melbourne’s Early Career Researcher Grants scheme aims to support early career researchers (ECRs) to undertake high-quality projects and pilot studies, strengthen their track records, and enhance their profile and capability in competing for external funding. This scheme is a core part of the University’s research development strategy under Advancing Melbourne, which places a high priority on nurturing research careers.

1.2 The ECR Grants scheme is supported by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (DVCR) strategic funding and matched funding from Faculties. The scheme is administered by Research, Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC) in conjunction with Faculties.

1.3 Grant funding for the 2024 scheme will be awarded for a period of one year: 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.

1.4 These Scheme Guidelines are the core document governing the administration of the scheme. They are intended to assist Chancellery, RIC and Faculties with scheme administration, provide the Selection Committee with guidance for their assessment and decision-making, and give ECR Grant applicants the key information on the purpose and requirements of the scheme.

2.1 The objectives of the ECR Grant scheme are to:

a) Support ECRs with strong research potential to establish and progress their research careers;

b) Provide competitive funding for high-quality ECR research projects and pilot studies;

c) Provide ECRs with practical experience in preparing a grant application for peer review;

d) Build ECRs’ track profile and record in order to enhance their competitiveness in bidding for external research funds;

e) Provide research funding for projects that are strategically aligned with the University’s priorities:
   - Research at Melbourne: https://research.unimelb.edu.au/research-at-melbourne
   - Advancing Melbourne: https://about.unimelb.edu.au/strategy/advancing-melbourne

3.1 The scheme funds applications that support excellence in pure and applied research projects undertaken by individual researchers across all research fields.

a) Pure research is experimental, exploratory, or theoretical work undertaken to acquire new knowledge without necessarily looking for long-term application and impact other than the advancement of knowledge.

b) Applied research is original work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge with the objective of
The scheme supports the creation or performance of a work of art only when it is primarily oriented towards research, which means:

- It is accompanied by exegesis or other form of critical analysis;
- It is open to peer review; and
- It has an enduring form.

Applications that are not primarily oriented towards research will not be considered. For example, this includes but is not limited to the following:

- Scholarly investigations that are not anticipated to lead to conceptual advances or discoveries, or to novel practical outcomes and applications;
- Projects such as uncritical bibliographical compilations, purely descriptive catalogues and editions that do not involve original research;
- Activities that lead solely to the creation or performance of a work of art, including visual art, musical compositions, drama, dance, designs or literary works (i.e. are not accompanied by an exegesis or other form of critical analysis, and/or are not in enduring form, and/or are not open to peer review);
- Production of teaching materials (regardless of whether research may be required in their creation);
- Development of research aids and tools, including computer programs, unless the application demonstrates how the development of these tools integrally contributes to research objectives and outcomes.

Eligibility requirements

To be eligible to apply for an ECR Grant, applicants must:

- Hold or have a confirmed future salaried (fixed-term or continuing) academic appointment of at least 0.5FTE at Level A, B or C at the University of Melbourne, that begins 1 January 2024 or earlier;
- Hold or have a confirmed future salaried (fixed term or continuing) academic appointment of at least 0.5FTE at Level A, B or C, with a Department/School of the University of Melbourne but based at an affiliated medical research institute or a non-medical research institute, that begins 1 January 2024 or earlier;
- Be an honorary staff member based at an affiliated research institute whose ECR Grant will be administered by the University. In these cases, the affiliated institute hosting the ECR Grant holder will be responsible for covering the portion of grant funding that is normally contributed by the Faculty.

To be eligible, applicants must hold or have reasonable expectation (at the time of application) of holding an appointment until 31 December 2024. Where applicants who do not hold a continuing appointment, or a fixed-term contract appointment to 31 December 2024, their Head of Department/School must confirm salary support for contract extension in the certification section of the application form.

To be eligible, applicants must have been awarded a PhD within the last five years (on or after 3 July
Researchers are **not eligible** to apply for an ECR Grant if:

a) They have previously been awarded an ECR Grant, and have drawn on the funding and have substantially completed the funded project;

b) They are, or have been, the first named/lead Chief Investigator or major beneficiary of an ARC or NHMRC grant (or a discipline-specific equivalent) since the award of their PhD;

c) They hold a University of Melbourne Research Fellowship, including a McKenzie, Mary Lugton, or Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellowship.

Applicants are limited to submitting one application for an ECR Grant under this scheme per year.

**Eligibility Exemption Requests: purpose and process**

Applicants who are not eligible under 4.1-4.3 may apply for an exemption through lodgment of an Eligibility Exemption Request (EER). EERs are submitted to a senior academic subcommittee for decision prior to the close of the ECR Grant scheme. Applying for an eligibility exemption does not automatically grant an exemption and eligibility is at the determination of the ECR Grant scheme’s eligibility subcommittee’s assessment of the circumstances.

The EER process is open to potential applicants who:

a) have worked in an academic research organisation for less than five years FTE and received their PhD before 3 July 2018;

b) have a compelling case for eligibility that is not otherwise covered by these Guidelines, which must be discussed in detail with the RDS team in RIC before the EER is lodged; or

c) have had career interruption/s, as outlined at 4.8.

EERs under 4.6 recognise that significant interruptions relating to career and/or life experiences may affect a researcher’s capacity, productivity, or contribution. The University recognises that the impact of any interruption may extend beyond the duration of a specific event, and the full extent of any interruption, reflecting individual circumstances, can be included for consideration by the ECR Grant Selection Committee. Interruptions can include, but are not limited to:

a) Unemployment;

b) Non-research employment (subject to 4.7(a) in these Guidelines);

c) Limited or no access to facilities and resources—such as through workplace interruptions;

d) Disaster management and recovery;

e) Misadventure;

f) Medical conditions;

g) Disability;

h) Caring and parental responsibilities; and

i) Community obligations, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and protocols.

Where the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the impact of the constraint or interruption this can documented as a contributing factor.

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1 The award of the PhD is defined as the date of the official notification letter or, for those awarded PhDs where the institution does not supply such letters, the date that the applicant has completed all the required steps to be eligible to graduate with a PhD. Submission of a PhD for examination is not an indication that all steps have been completed.

2 These align with the career interruptions considerations applied by the Australian Research Council.
4.9 As part of the EER application, applicants must provide a clear timeline of their working periods and interruptions periods, with supporting documentation wherever possible.

5 APPLICATION PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS

5.1 Prospective applicants should read and follow the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document when completing their application. Applications will not be checked after submission for completeness or eligibility; this is the responsibility of the applicant. Ineligible or incomplete applications will be excluded and not considered by the selection committee.

5.2 Applications must be submitted via the University of Melbourne’s SmartyGrants application portal. Head of School/Department certification is required on a separate page that must be uploaded as a PDF into the online application before submission. Signatures may be handwritten, approved digital signatures, or image files used with explicit permission of the signatory.

5.3 Selection committees will only be provided with application material that adheres to word or page limits.

5.4 Requested funding must adhere to the minimum and maximum amounts detailed in these Guidelines (at Part 7). An application that requests less than the minimum funding or more than the maximum funding available per project will be deemed ineligible.

5.5 Applications that request funds that duplicate or supplement another current internal University of Melbourne grant, external grant or research contract will be excluded from consideration. If an applicant already holds a grant in a related area, it is the applicant’s responsibility to provide sufficient information to assure their Faculty that the ECR grant is not being used to ‘top-up’ another existing grant. Please refer to the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document for instructions on how to address this.

5.6 Applicants will need to adhere to the particular internal submission requirements of each Faculty, and should see the RIC website for specific requirements.

6 BUDGET ITEMS

**Budget items supported**

6.1 Items that directly support the research program may be funded, including:

a) Personnel;

b) Relief from other duties;

c) Equipment;

d) Maintenance;

e) Travel;

f) Other.

Please refer to the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document for further guidance on supported budget items and budget justification. The Selection Committee reserves the right to made reasonable adjustments to the budget of an awarded project.

**Budget items not supported**

6.2 Funding may not be sought or used to fund the ECR grant holder’s salary and/or on-costs.
6.3 Funds will not be provided for the following purposes:

a) Fees for international students or Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) or Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) liabilities;

b) Staff seeking funding for their own postgraduate studies;

c) Costs not directly related to research or the project;

d) Funds that duplicate or supplement another current internal University grant, external grant or research contract;

e) Non-specialist equipment available readily to University staff through Faculties, such as desktop computers or laptops;

f) Salaries for research collaborator(s). This does not include salaries for research support staff or technical support staff.

g) Article Processing Charges (APC - sometimes called open access fees) to make a work openly accessible where the University already has an institutional subscription to the journal (hybrid journals). Researchers who wish to publish in subscription journals can make their work openly accessible through the deposit of a copy of their work in the institutional repository, Minerva Access. Applicants are also encouraged to take advantage of the University's Research and Publish agreements to support. Applicants should contact their local liaison librarians for further advice;

h) Society membership fees.

7 SELECTION CRITERIA AND FUNDING STRUCTURE

7.1 All applications will be assessed by a Faculty Research Committee and the ECR Grants Selection Committee using the following selection criteria:

a) Researcher development (40%)
   • Career stage and positioning at early career stage to gain maximum advantage from an ECR grant;
   • Likely impact on the ECR’s career development and their competitiveness in securing future external funding, indicated by the applicant’s stated plans to secure funding in the future.
   • How the research project will allow the ECR to foster their own independent research activities

b) The quality of the project (30%)
   • Significance of the project (including some consideration of the alignment with University and Faculty strategies), and the extent to which the project is soundly conceived and planned.
   • Likelihood that the research proposed will lay the foundation for or lead to:
     - A demonstrable conceptual advance;
     - An important discovery, innovation or solution of an important practical problem
     - A contribution of economic or social benefit to Australia;
     - Ongoing research collaboration with an external government organisation or industry.
   • Independence of the project from existing funded projects held by the ECR or their collaborators.

c) Feasibility and resources (30%)
   • Demonstration that the project aims are feasible, given the research aims and timelines, and the experience and time commitment of the ECR Grant holder and any collaborator(s).
   • Demonstration that the ECR will have the time to complete the proposed project within the context of existing research, teaching and higher degree supervision responsibilities.
• Sound justification of budget items in the project budget.

7.2 DVCR strategic funding shall be allocated to the scheme as follows:

• 70% of this funding will be allocated to applications that Faculties support and have ranked in order of merit; the allocation of grants is in accordance with the 2022 block grant distributions and in line with the respective Faculty rankings.

• 30% of this funding will be allocated to supported applications from Faculties, to include consideration of the criteria at 7.1, and broader institutional and strategic considerations such as:
  - Supporting Interdisciplinary research
  - Equity and diversity (e.g. Indigenous researchers and women in disciplines in which they are underrepresented)
  - A fair and equitable distribution across Faculties, as determined by the Selection Committee.

7.3 Each grant awarded will comprise matched Chancellery and Faculty funds.

7.4 For applicants from all Faculties, grant funding will normally be awarded as follows, unless by prior approval (on a case-by-case basis) from the Chair of the Selection Committee:


• Minimum of $5,000 and a maximum of $40,000 for Engineering and Information Technology, Science, Medicine Dentistry and Health Sciences, and Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences.

7.5 Regarding research that proposes to engage with Indigenous knowledges, people or communities, applicants should take account of the advice provided by the AITSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and the NHMRC Ethical Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

7.6 Research-only staff whose salary is sourced from an externally funded project must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the relevant Faculty that the nature of their appointment means that they are allowed, and have the time available, to pursue additional research activities (see Part A4 of the Application Form).

7.7 Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously received significant competitively-awarded funding for research costs.

7.8 Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously received funding from any sources, however applicants (other than those noted in 4.4 and 7.7) with some previous or current funding are eligible to apply and the significance and relevance of any previous funding held will be considered by the relevant faculty or school selection and ranking committee, in reference to the Scheme Guidelines and objectives.

8 EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

8.1 A committee established by each Faculty, chaired by the respective Associate Dean (Research) or equivalent, will initially assess applications on a competitive basis in accordance with the objectives of the scheme (Section 2 of this document) and the selection criteria (Section 7 of this document), prior to consideration by the Selection Committee.

8.2 Each Faculty will rank and list which applications they will support for funding consideration. Faculties are
asked to rank all applications based on the merit of the application, according to the objectives of the scheme and the selection criteria, and to provide short justifications for these rankings.

8.3 The ECR Grants Selection Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) or delegate, will consider all applications ranked by Faculties and determine final funding allocations.

8.4 Applications are reviewed by a multi-disciplinary committee, so applicants should ensure that their application, including the project description, is clearly written and accessible to an expert in another discipline.

8.5 The ECR Grants Selection Committee reserves the right to discuss applications, on a confidential basis, with Deans, Associate Deans (Research), Heads of Department/School, Centre Directors or other senior colleagues.

8.6 Application and assessment of applications should align with the University’s Diversity and Inclusion strategy and underpinning principles, and the University’s Performance Relative to Opportunity guidelines.

9 SCHEME TIMETABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 March 2023</td>
<td>Release of Funding Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 8 May 2023, 3pm</td>
<td>Eligibility Exemption Requests (EERs) due to RIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 May 2023</td>
<td>Outcomes of EERs provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 3 July 2023, 3pm</td>
<td>Final applications due to RIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 17 July 2023 (on or before)</td>
<td>RIC provides eligible applications to Faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 August 2023 (on or before)</td>
<td>Faculties provide rankings and funding amounts to RIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2023</td>
<td>ECR Grants Selection Committee meeting to decide on final allocations based on Faculty recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 6 October 2023</td>
<td>Outcomes announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2024</td>
<td>2024 ECR Grants start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 2024</td>
<td>2024 ECR Grants expected to finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 May 2025</td>
<td>ECR (grant holder) to lodge final report (as per funding conditions)</td>
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</table>

Please note that some Faculties may have additional internal submission requirements prior to the final RIC submission date – please see the RIC webpage for details.

10 APPEALS

10.1 In appropriate circumstances, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may establish an independent Appeals Committee.

10.2 Appeals will be heard only against the implementation or exercise of the selection procedures. Appeals will not
be heard against Faculty or ECR Grant Selection Committee rankings or comments as to the academic merit of applications. An applicant may appeal only where there is clear evidence that the implementation or exercise of the selection procedures has contravened these Scheme Guidelines.

10.3 Applicants wishing to appeal against a decision must notify the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability) in writing within twenty-eight days of advice of the outcome of the application.

11 FUNDING CONDITIONS

11.1 Grant offers must be accepted by the ECR Grant holder and their Head of Department/School by means of a fully completed and signed Acceptance Form.

11.2 The ECR grant holder is responsible for the project, its concept, the strategic decisions called for in its pursuit, and for the communication of the results.

11.3 The ECR grant holder will be the contact person for all administrative matters to do with the project.

11.4 The ECR grant holder must ensure that the research is conducted in accordance with University policy, including compliance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)* and policies on human research ethics, animal experimentation ethics, requirements of the Office of Gene Technology Regulator, health and safety and intellectual property. No project may proceed unless the appropriate ethical or other required clearances have been obtained.

11.5 Where a funded ECR Grant project involves external collaboration, the University of Melbourne’s interests should be appropriately clarified and secured. In some circumstances, the external collaborator’s institution will be asked to enter a collaboration agreement with the University before the ECR Grant funds can be used for the collaborative aspects of the project. Details of planned collaboration(s) are required in the Acceptance Form. RIC will subsequently advise if a collaboration agreement is likely to be needed.

11.6 Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2024 and are subsequently awarded a McKenzie, Mary Lugton or a Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellowship to commence in 2024 must relinquish one of the awards.

11.7 Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2024, and subsequently win an external Australian Competitive Grant for funding in 2024, will be able to hold both awards.

11.8 Extensions for grant funds expenditure and completion may be considered under the following circumstances:
   a) Exceptional Circumstances
      A written request for an extension that details the exceptional circumstance(s) must be approved by the ECR grant holder’s Head of Department/School, and submitted to res-devschemes@unimelb.edu.au, no later than 30 November 2024. The maximum extension considered will be completion by 30 June 2025. A pro forma extension form is available from the RIC website.
   b) Parental Leave
      The completion date for the ECR Grant will be extended by the equivalent length of the Parental Leave taken. Grant holders should advise both their Faculty and RIC when parental leave is approved.
   c) Prolonged sick leave or serious illness
      The completion date for the ECR Grant will be extended by the equivalent length of time of the approved sick leave.
11.9 Extensions will not normally be granted over six months except in the case of b) approved parental leave or c) prolonged sick leave as above.

11.10 The ECR Grant holder must comply with any instructions and/or conditions in the Letter of Award relating to approved items of expenditure.

11.11 Unless special conditions are set down by the Selection Committee, the grant should be regarded as a ‘one-line budget’. The ECR Grant holder is responsible for ensuring that the expenditure of the grant is broadly in accord with the budget presented in the application and consistent with the nature and aims of the specific project approved and the objectives of the scheme.

11.12 Should the ECR Grant holder’s employment circumstances change (i.e. if the ECR Grant holder moves to a new Department/School/Faculty) they must contact both RIC and their Faculty ECR administrator immediately. Arrangements for the continuation of the ECR Grant will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Chair of the Selection Committee in conjunction with the relevant Faculty(s).

11.13 Should the ECR Grant holder’s employment at the University of Melbourne cease during the grant-funded period, they must notify RIC and their Faculty ECR administrator immediately and relinquish any remaining ECR Grant funding. This is an internal grant to the University of Melbourne and is non-transferrable.

Reporting requirements

11.14 The ECR Grant holder is required to provide a written report to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability) via RIC on the outcomes of the project by 31 May 2025 (unless there has been an approved extension to the project end date). The final report form is found at Manage Your Grant. ECR Grant holders are expected to demonstrate how the ECR Grant built their research capability and contributed to broader research themes and linkages. Summaries of ECR Grant projects and final reports may be used externally or published by the University.

11.15 Unsatisfactory final reports will be referred to relevant Heads of Department/Schools and/or Associate Deans (Research) for comment or follow-up action. Please note that failure to provide this report by the deadline may result in future applications to University of Melbourne internal research programs being ruled ineligible.

11.16 In addition to a final report of project outcomes, the ECR Grant holder is required to provide a financial acquittal report. Any unspent DVCR strategic funds remaining at the conclusion of the grant period must be relinquished.

11.17 ECR Grant holders are expected to give appropriate acknowledgement of University support through this scheme when communicating their research outcomes.