

QDSA Collaborative Research Grants 2026

Queensland Defence Science Alliance

Guidelines

1. About this Opportunity

- 1.1. The QDSA Collaborative Research Grant is a competitive program that supports collaboration between QDSA member universities (See **Annex A** for full list), industry partners and other Australian Defence Science and Universities Network (ADSUN) universities. The scheme is administered by the Queensland Defence Science Alliance and funded through contributions from the Department of Defence, Queensland State Government and QDSA member universities.
- 1.2. The purpose of the Grant is to foster academic and Defence industry partnerships within Queensland and (with the addition of Charles Darwin University), the Northern Territory. QDSA Collaborative Research Grant projects should demonstrate an impact to satisfy an existing or emerging Defence need and have a clear plan to mature, with additional support, into Defence capability.
- 1.3. The QDSA Collaborative Research Grants will be open to applicants who are academic researchers at QDSA member universities (See **Annex A** for full list), industry partners and other ADSUN universities based in any State or Territory, as part of a collaborative project with the member university.
- 1.4. Applications for QDSA Collaborative Research Grants will be solicited through a public call via the QDSA website and promoted through communication channels such as LinkedIn and the Australian Industry Defence Network (AIDN).
- 1.5. For individuals wishing to participate, QDSA may be able to connect industry partners and other ADSUN universities with QDSA member universities upon request.

2. Support Available

- 2.1. Successful proposals will be offered up to \$250,000 per project from the available funding allocation. QDSA will endeavour to fund as many high priority projects as possible with available funding for 2026.
- 2.2. Projects are expected to be completed within 12-18 months.
- 2.3. All funds, including industry and QDSA contributions, must be used for research & development activities directly related to the approved project.

3. Eligibility Criteria

- 3.1. Projects must be led by a QDSA member university and maximise collaboration across other ADSUN universities and industry partners. **QDSA encourages potential applicants to engage with QDSA via info@qdsa.au to discuss their proposed project teaming prior to applying.**
- 3.2. Applicants who are the lead investigator and have received QDSA CRG funding within the last round, are not permitted to apply as the lead in the current CRG round. QDSA is serious about ensuring delivery of previous grants funded, should you have any concerns please contact QDSA to discuss for further clarification.
- 3.3. All QDSA Collaborative Research Grants will be contracted under the standard "Collaborative Research Agreement" by Griffith University as the administering organisation ("Alliance Administrator") of the Queensland Defence Science Alliance.

- 3.4. To be eligible for QDSA Collaborative Research Grant funds, an industry partner must be:
- 3.4.1. An Australian industry partner holding an Australian Business Number (ABN), registered as a company or trust based in Queensland, or
 - 3.4.2. Industry partners outside of Queensland (with an ABN) will be considered however the team must have collaboration with a Queensland based University member or Queensland based industry partner to maximise funding potential.
- 3.5. Industry applicants are not eligible for QDSA Collaborative Research Project grant if they are:
- 3.5.1. Do not have a link to a member university or Queensland Based industry partner
 - 3.5.2. Do not have an ABN
 - 3.5.3. Exempt from income tax.
- 3.6. The CRG project should have reached Technology Readiness level 3 (proof-of-concept) to be considered and, with additional support, define a clear pathway through to TRL 6 to 7 (prototype stage).
- 3.7. The intent is to support the technology up to a readiness level appropriate for further development into a capability by a larger party (Federal funding scheme/Defence prime). Therefore, the project must have a clear plan for transition to capability beyond the 12-month project.
- 3.8. As a condition of the funding arrangements, the participants in a project must be Australian citizens or permanent Australian residents.

4. Application Process & Timeline

- 4.1. The process is in two stages: an initial Expression of Interest (EOI) followed by a detailed application. Once the EOI has been issued and applications received, Proposals are ranked and shortlisted by a selection panel from QDSA, State Government and Defence Science & Technology Group (DSTG). Proposals that are selected are then requested to submit a detailed application, which is assessed more rigorously by the selection panel as well as Defence stakeholders and subject matter experts. Final approval is made by the QDSA Governance Board on recommendation from the Selection Committee.
- 4.2. The phases of the application process are as follows:
- 4.2.1. Applicants engage with QDSA to discuss proposed project and potential teaming
 - 4.2.2. EOI's are submitted electronically via the QDSA website portal and collated by QDSA
 - 4.2.3. As directed by the QDSA Board, a selection panel is established to assess the EOIs. The selection panel is drawn from QDSA, State Government, DSTG and Defence subject matter experts. The purpose of the selection panel is to determine a merit order of projects as they move through EOI and detailed proposal phases.
 - 4.2.4. Defence stakeholders provide input to the selection panel for each project, to support the assessment of relevance to Defence, likely impact and feasibility.
 - 4.2.5. The shortlisted projects are offered an opportunity to provide additional detail around the project to be considered as part of the detailed application phase. Detailed applications are considered further by the selection panel and a final merit order established.
 - 4.2.6. Using the ranked, shortlisted projects, the QDSA Director makes a recommendation to the QDSA Board and seeks approval for the selected projects to move to the Contract phase.
 - 4.2.7. The successful applicants are notified, and necessary contracts established.

4.3. For the 2026 round, the key dates are anticipated as follows:

- 4.3.1. EOI applications open – 14 July 2026
- 4.3.2. 2026 QDSA CRG Briefing and Networking Event – 23 July 2026
- 4.3.3. EOI applications close – 18 August 2026 5pm (AEST)
- 4.3.4. EOI's shortlisted and ranked – week commencing 1 September 2026
- 4.3.5. Notification of success and request for detailed applications open – 7 September 2026
- 4.3.6. Detailed applications close – 13 October 2026 5pm (AEST)
- 4.3.7. Selection panel meets for final determination – week commencing 27 October 2026
- 4.3.8. Selection panel outcomes presented to QDSA Board for endorsement – 17 November 2026
- 4.3.9. Notification of successful proposals – from 4 December 2026

4.4. The EOI's must be submitted electronically using the form on QDSA website <https://qdsa.au/> and must include the following: Lead Institution and Lead Researcher; Project Title; Project Description; Project Area Alignment; Collaboration; Funding Requested and Co-investment. See **Section 5** for a summary of the fields required.

4.5. The detailed applications must be submitted electronically via the QDSA website portal link provided in request and must include the following: Lead Institution and Lead Researcher; Project Description; Project Area Alignment; Collaboration; Impact for Defence; Project Feasibility and; Co-investment. See **Section 6** for a summary of the fields required.

4.6. Successful applicants will be required to enter into a collaborative agreement between QDSA and all project partners. It is expected that successful applicants will be sent and able to execute the finalised agreement without delay, after being notified of the award, in order to expedite commencement and delivery of projects. Template agreements are therefore being provided to applicants for their review before the closing deadline for full (detailed) applications.

4.7. If participating organisations are not able to accept the terms of the template agreement, they should advise QDSA at the time of application submission. Generally, terms of the agreement will not be able to be substantially modified (allowing for correction of errors of fact or typos). See separate **QDSA Collaborative Research Agreement Templates – Information Sheet**, for further information.

4.8. Applicants must submit all applications electronically via the QDSA website portal at the link provided by the due date.

5. Expressions of Interest

5.1. The EOI online submission form must include the following: Lead Institution and Lead Researcher; Project Title; Project Description; Project Area Alignment; Collaboration; Funding Requested and Co-investment.

- 5.1.1. Project Description – A brief description of the project of no more than 150 words. It should outline the research focus and how it will relate to developing Defence needs.
- 5.1.2. Project Area Alignment – Alignment with the priorities and topics as listed in **Annex B**. This should also describe the proposed Impact for Defence.
- 5.1.3. Collaboration – Details of any other university staff on the research team, including QDSA member universities, other ADSUN universities, industry partners and any engagement of support from Defence. See **Annex B** for more detail. (**Consideration for applicants:** Applications from multiple collaborators are more attractive than those from single entities and this should be considered when establishing a team.)

- 5.1.4. Funding Requested – An approximate figure is required at this stage.
- 5.1.5. Co-investment – From a Defence industry partner or QDSA member university may be cash or in-kind. (**Consideration for applicants:** While not mandatory, the greater the co-investment, the more attractive the proposal will be.)
- 5.2. The selection process entails ranking the projects according to a score based on the set of criteria and then shortlisting the top applications as determined by a selection panel from QDSA, State Government and DSTG.
- 5.3. For each project, the score is determined as follows:
 - 5.3.1. A numeric grade is given to each criterion by the assessors. See **Annex C** for more detail.
 - 5.3.2. For each criterion, the grades are averaged across assessors.
 - 5.3.3. A score is produced by summing the weighted average grades. The weights reflect the relative importance of each criterion and are agreed upon by the assessors prior to ranking. They are equal across all project applications.
- 5.4. The projects are then sorted by score, in descending order.
- 5.5. The total number of projects to be progressed to the next stage is agreed upon by the panel and the top projects are discussed in order until that number is met.

6. Detailed Applications

- 6.1. As described within the 2026 QDSA Detailed Proposal template, Detailed Applications must include the following information: Lead Institution and Lead Researcher; Project Title; Funding Requested; Project Description; Project Area Alignment; Collaboration; Feasibility; Effectiveness and Impact; Funding Requested and Co-investment and; Intellectual Property (IP) Arrangements.
 - 6.1.1. Project Description – A detailed description of the project of no more than 1000 words. The description should nominally include:
 - Project Overview
 - Background, including lead-up/foundational work by the same team
 - Aims or Objectives the project will deliver
 - Expected Results and likely benefits
 - Prospective Follow-on Work
 - 6.1.2. Project Area Alignment – Alignment with the priorities and topics as listed in **Annex B**. This should also describe the proposed Impact for Defence.
 - 6.1.3. Collaboration – Details of any planned collaboration on the project should be listed. The unique roles and responsibilities that each team member brings to the project should be clearly articulated. Where possible written endorsement from partners should be provided affirming their commitment to the Project. Collaborators may include:
 - Researchers from academic institutions such as other university staff from QDSA member universities and other ADSUN universities, as well as any engagement of support from Defence or other government organisations.
 - Industry partners should be identified with an indication of their business and size.

6.1.4. Feasibility – Feasibility should include:

- Project timeline with milestones/outputs
- Budget justification – The budget should detail the breakdown of costs and expenses, including where the funds are coming from, how they'll be used, and any criteria for future contributions. See Use of Funds, below.
- Approvals required

6.1.5. Effectiveness and Impact – Explain how the project enhances ADF operational capability and secures strategic advantage and builds sovereign industry capability, or economic development for Queensland.

- Summarise the Defence capability design and benefits.
- Outline what the pathway to implementation would be.

6.1.6. Funding Requested and Co-investment – Each project must bring a matched level of co-investment for the requested amount from QDSA. The co-investment can be a combination of the following:

- Cash contributions (Preferred)
- In-kind contributions
- Other contributions

6.1.7. Intellectual Property (IP) Arrangements – IP arrangements should include:

- Description of the planned IP arrangements that all project parties have agreed to in relation to ownership, licencing and potential future commercialisation opportunities of all Background and Project IP.
- Confirmation of which Collaborative Research Agreement template option that would fit their intended partner arrangements.

6.2. Detailed applications should also include letters of support from contributing organisations and clearly identify any information (including attachments) that must be treated as confidential.

6.3. In addition to the detailed applications, applicants will be required to review the relevant Collaborative Research Agreement template (provided at the time of shortlisting) and advise of any non-compliance with clauses, offering alternate position for consideration by QDSA. Potential projects involved at the detailed proposal phase should seek review of the current 2026 QDSA Collaborative Research Grant contract with their parent organisation.

6.4. The selection process is similar to that for the EOI's. However, the score for each detailed project incorporates a level of interest from Defence and the final decision is made by the Governance Board upon recommendation by the QDSA Director.

6.5. Subject matter experts and Defence stakeholders are identified for each detailed application, and their Level of Interest on behalf of Defence incorporated into a new set of criteria.

6.6. The detailed projects are re-assessed by a selection panel from QDSA, State Government and DSTG. They are then ranked according to a score based on the new set of criteria and sorted in descending order.

6.7. Projects should consider the proposed workshare offered to project collaborators throughout the project. QDSA is seeking meaningful and realistic contributions to workshare across project participants.

6.8. Projects which vary their co-contributions between the EOI and Detailed proposal phase may be asked to justify the variation and QDSA reserves the right to set aside the proposed project from further consideration.

- 6.9. The ranked detailed projects determined by the selection panel, the QDSA Director makes a recommendation to the Governance Board and seeks endorsement for the successful projects to be funded.

7. Use of Funds

- 7.1. Funding from the QDSA Collaborative Research Project Grant program will be in the form of a cash contribution following the execution of a Collaborative Research Agreement.
- 7.2. Successful applicants are expected to enter into a Collaborative Research Agreement with QDSA (represented by the Alliance Administrator) and all other Project Parties (where relevant).
- 7.3. Cash contributions from industry partners must be transferred to the QDSA member university upon execution of the Agreement.
- 7.4. Funds awarded by QDSA for the project will be transferred in full to the lead organisation on receipt of invoice.
- 7.5. The lead organisation will then be responsible for transferring funds to other Project Parties as documented in the Agreement.
- 7.6. Funds must be used to directly support the research project described in the application form and must be spent by the QDSA member university or industry partner. Funds can be applied to the following:
- 7.6.1. 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 QDSA's approval.
 - 7.6.2. On-cost salary expenses up to maximum of 30% of direct salary costs and consistent with the university or company policy.
 - 7.6.3. Equipment, software, material, and consumables essential for the project. 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.
 - 7.6.4. Travel costs essential to the project for the researchers working on the project excluding conference travel costs.
 - 7.6.5. Stipends for HDR students working on the project.
- 7.7. Budget items which are not supported by the QDSA Collaborative Research project funding and should NOT be requested in the budget include:
- 7.7.1. Infrastructure (overhead) costs related to general operations of the university or industry partner shared among projects and functions.
 - 7.7.2. Costs not directly related to the project including but not limited to conference fees, workshop expenses, entertainment costs, professional membership fees, teaching relief, professional development courses, visas, relocation costs, insurance and other indirect costs.
- 7.8. All expenses must be itemised in a budget section of the grant application. Funds must be spent in accordance with this budget and any requests for variations must be made to QDSA and approved in advance.
- 7.9. QDSA reserves the right to tailor funding support according to what it believes is required to assist with the project delivery.

8. Reporting Requirements

- 8.1. The project timeline and milestones are to be confirmed with QDSA and the Project Lead/Chief Investigator prior to commencement.

- 8.2. A brief status update to QDSA per three-month block (In accordance with the template provided).
- 8.3. A final project report (including summary of financial expenditure) to be provided to QDSA with 60 days of project conclusion.
- 8.4. A demonstration of the project outcomes as agreed with QDSA
- 8.5. A final in-person presentation showcasing project outcomes at an event agreed with QDSA (such as the QDSA Annual Showcase).
- 8.6. All university applicants are expected to communicate with the relevant QDSA Defence Collaboration Coordinators at each university to ensure that they have visibility of the progress of their project.
- 8.7. Successful projects will be contacted by QDSA every six months to provide a short update on:
 - 8.7.1. Follow on grants applied for and received
 - 8.7.2. Follow on contracts
 - 8.7.3. Follow on export opportunities

Annexes:

- A. The Selection Panel and Member Universities
- B. Assessment Criteria
- C. Scoring Guideline (For Selection Panel only)

ANNEX A: The Selection Panel and Member Universities

The purpose of the QDSA Selection Panel is to assess suitability and allocate funding to proposed projects based upon their evaluation of the proposals submitted for that round and the feedback of subject matter experts. The Selection Panel will be made up of members from the below with a minimum of a representative from QDSA, State Government, DSTG and Defence to form a quorum:

- QDSA Director and Associate Director
- QLD Government delegate
- External DST Group or Defence delegate
- Other subject matter experts as determined appropriate by the Board

The Selection Panel Chair will be the QDSA Associate Director. The Selection Panel Chair will:

- Ensure that proposals for review will be distributed to Panel members with reasonable notice before the Selection Panel is convened.
- Ensure that feedback from expert technical advisors is provided as soon as possible.
- Manage conflict of interest issues.
- Record the scoring, merit order and recommendations of the Selection Panel.
- Prepare an evaluation report on the decisions of the Panel.

Members of the QDSA Collaborative Research Project Selection Panel will be expected to:

- Declare any conflict of interest.
- Agree to confidentiality terms.
- Abstain from corresponding with applicants or interested parties relating to the proposal during or after the review process.
- Review the proposals against the selection criteria and provide an objective appraisal against these criteria.

Conflict of Interest

During the technical review process, QDSA will endeavour to eliminate conflicts of interest. If a reviewer believes they have a conflict of interest, they will be expected to explain their conflict of interest and withdraw themselves from the review process, with the understanding that they may be replaced by an alternate reviewer sourced by QDSA.

Conflicts of interest may be:

- Direct – you are an interested party in a proposal.
- Indirect – you have an association with one or more of the institutions involved in the proposal.

Involvement in a competing proposal or business, i.e., you have an involvement that is direct or indirect with a competing proposal or business activity.

The Selection and Review Process

Applicants are required to submit proposals using the online application form. Applicants are allowed to include documents that provide evidence to support their proposal. The reviewer is expected to assess the proposal based on the application and supporting documents provided.

Proposals will be distributed to reviewers who will score the proposal against specific criteria in **Annex B** and provide an objective appraisal of the proposal against these criteria. The purpose of these criteria is to support consistency across various applicants, research domains and reviewers. A grading system for assessment is provided in **Annex C**.

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).

Member Universities

Current QDSA Member Universities are:

- Griffith University
- James Cook University
- University of Queensland
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- Charles Darwin University

Should you require connection to these universities please contact info@qdsa.au for assistance.

ANNEX B: Assessment Criteria

The following defines the criteria used for assessment of Projects. Reviewers will assess only those criteria allocated to them. If any clarification is required on criteria, please contact the Queensland Defence Science Alliance via info@qdsa.au.

Project Area Alignment

Project proposals should be aligned with the QDSA Research Priorities and Topics, which were drawn from the 2026 Defence IS&T Priorities, National Defence Strategy, Integrated Investment Program, and wide consultation with Defence stakeholders.

The theme for the QDSA 2026 CRG Program is **Ground/Surface-based Air Defence**. The **Research Topics (numbered)**, Context/Environment descriptors (lettered) and *challenges (dot points)* are:

1. Counter High-Speed Threat

- a. Detection, tracking, targeting
 - *ground-based tracking*
 - *stratospheric targeting*
 - *guidance systems*
 - *integrated, multi-layered defence*
- b. Non-kinetic effectors
 - *Electronic warfare (EW)*

2. Counter UAS

- a. Sensing, seeking
 - *radio frequency (RF)*
 - *electro optical (EO)*
 - *radar, seismic, acoustic*
- b. Kinetic and non-kinetic effectors
 - *ground-launched platforms*
 - *directed energy*
 - *high-power RF*
- c. Other systems
 - *command & control (C2)*
 - *multi-vehicle tracking*
 - *sensor fusion*

3. Decision Support

- a. Information fusion
 - *threat evaluation*
 - *reducing cognitive load*
- b. Human-machine teaming
 - *hybrid autonomous decision systems*
 - *rapid decision making*
- c. Integration
 - *Joint Air Battle Management System (JABMS) integration*
 - *modular open-systems architectures*

Common Requirements of the Research Topics include:

- *Integration with current in-service systems*
- *Modularized components*
- *Cluttered electromagnetic and urban environments*
- *Resilience to cyber and EW interference*
- *Power requirements (energy/range/endurance)*

Projects that do not align to the Defence needs listed above may be considered as long as they are aimed at supporting other Defence priorities.

Collaboration

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

Applications should demonstrate the level of collaboration including work share by describing:

- any other ADSUN university staff on the research team, preferable from more than one QDSA member university.
- any industry partner as part of the research team, preferably Queensland based.
- any engagement of support from Defence, such as from the Defence Science and Technology Group or uniformed Defence member (where Protected Identity constraints allow).
- unique roles and responsibilities the team members will bring to the project.

Feasibility

Feasibility assesses the ability of your proposed team, funding, and schedule to achieve the scope of the proposed project. It is not an assessment of the research topic per se, but rather in the confidence in achieving the project outcomes.

Applications should demonstrate this by describing:

- the experience of the collaborators and their track record in achieving successful research outcomes.
- mitigating factors to reduce the perceived technical risks.
- previous risk-mitigation measures which have been conducted to mature the Technology Readiness Level to date.
- your access requirements for specialist resources, platforms, infrastructure, equipment, or personnel and how you perceived this will be enabled.
- broad expected milestones.
- current commitments to other QDSA projects

Effectiveness and Impact

Impact is a subjective assessment and considers how your application enhances ADF operational capability, secures strategic advantage, growth of sovereign industry capability, or economic development for Queensland.

Applications should demonstrate this by describing:

- anticipated project outcomes.
- how the project addresses priority areas for Defence, as outlined in current strategic guidance released by Defence or related agency.
- how the project addresses sovereign industry capability needs.
- how the project and collaboration partners will influence the change.
- the relevance of the Defence endorsement, or previous Defence engagement which supports your project.

Funding Requested and Co-investment

It is preferred that eligible applications will have co-investment from a Defence industry partner or QDSA member university. As a guide, applications should demonstrate this by describing any co-contributions in cash or in-kind from team members. Co-investments from multiple organisations which exceed the funding requested are favourable, as are in-kind contributions. A 1:1 matched total co-contribution is desired for each project, for example a request for \$100,000 grant from QDSA would have a minimum \$100,000 co-contribution in cash or in kind from the project partners.