ARC Linkage Projects

Helping industry leverage research infrastructure

What is this scheme?

Linkage Projects is a grant program of the Australian Research Council (ARC). It aims to create long-term research alliances between researchers at higher education institutions and industry to solve challenging scientific and technological problems for the economic, social and/or cultural benefit of Australia. Twice a year, the ARC accepts applications to the Linkage Projects program from eligible higher education institutions, and then allocates funding on a competitive basis; funding levels range from AUD$30,000 up to AUD$500,000 per annum (p.a.) for up to 5 years. In exceptional circumstances, where an extremely high level of commitment is made by the industry partner, the ARC will consider funding levels of up to AUD$2,000,000 p.a.

The opportunity

Occasionally, your company may be faced with a major scientific or technological problem that is too difficult to solve in-house. Alternatively, the development of new future products or processes might require external collaboration. In either case, the Linkage Projects program gives your company the opportunity to become a “Partner Organisation” in an ARC Linkage Projects application. If successful, the grant provides your company with heavily subsidised access to an experienced research team that can pursue your research goals at a fraction of the cost of consulting.

How does it work?

The Linkage Projects program requires that all parties in the research alliance make significant contributions to the total research effort:

- One or more university nodes of the AMMRF must commit to provide (a) the expertise, knowledge and time of the academics who lead the project and (b) the facilities—such as advanced scientific instrumentation, laboratories, libraries, IT networks—that are necessary to carry out the project.
- As a Partner Organisation, your company must commit to provide a specific amount of cash and “in-kind” contributions (e.g., personnel time, raw materials or samples, access to industrial equipment, analysis costs, proprietary software) to help achieve the research goals of the project. The amounts of these contributions depend upon the total amount of funding requested: the cash contribution from the Partner Organisation must be a minimum of 20% of the total amount of funding requested from the ARC, and the in-kind contributions must be sufficient to at least match the remainder of the requested funding.

This means that the cash obtained for the research program from the ARC represents an approximate doubling of your company’s total investment in the project (cash and in-kind), and an up to 5 times return on the actual cash investment. This also provides access to the expertise and time of the AMMRF team at no additional cost, and the usual tax concessions for investment in R&D are available on the industry cash spent on the project by Australian companies.

An example: Leverage in action

Suppose that your company and your AMMRF research partners decide that the project requires a total cash budget of AUD$200,000 each year to hire the necessary research staff. In that case, the project contributions would be as follows:

ARC: Requested Linkage Projects funding = AUD160,000 p.a.

Partner Organisation: Cash = AUD40,000 p.a. (minimum);
In-kind = AUD120,000 p.a. (minimum).

AMMRF: The in-kind here is very much dependent on the project; a typical minimum value is AUD60,000 p.a.

What does the investment provide?

The money from the ARC and the Partner Organisation is used to fund research fellows and research students to undertake the research project. These researchers are based at the relevant AMMRF node(s), but may be seconded to the Partner Organisation for certain periods; alternatively, they may spend a certain fraction of each week at your site. In general, the AMMRF prefers to work on challenging problems that require three-to-five-year Linkage Projects. However, the AMMRF, in collaboration with your company, usually devises milestones that achieve commercially significant outcomes within months of commencing the project to meet the need for rapid results in industry.

The proposal cycle

The ARC calls for applications to the Linkage Projects program twice a year; submissions usually are due in May and in November. At least three months before the appropriate deadline, the ARC and the Partner Organisation must begin to finalise all the details associated with the proposed research program, such as the goals, the research team, the duration of project and the budget. Towards the end of this process, the AMMRF research team will devise a Linkage Project application. The ARC assesses this along with all other applications, and notifies successful applicants approximately six months after the original submission. Finally, an agreement must then be negotiated between the AMMRF node(s) and the Partner Organisation to equitably apportion the intellectual property that will be developed during the research. The ARC requires this agreement to be finalised before the research program begins.

AMMRF Founding Nodes: The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland, The University of Western Australia, The University of New South Wales, Australian National University, South Australian Regional Facility (SARF)