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Reviewing the national competitive grants program to achieve academic excellence

Australian Research Council – *National Competitive Grants Program Process Review*



Summary

The Australian Research Council (the ARC) wanted to align their National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) grant application and assessment processes with international best practice. Iceni were engaged to review and benchmark against similar organisations. We consulted with stakeholders and mapped the user experience to provide valuable insights and opportunities for improvement. Our work helped the ARC establish a baseline for the application and processes, allowing them to achieve the most efficient and effective practice.

ARC's challenge

In response to the changing landscape of academic grants and a series of external reviews, the ARC recognised the need to review their NCGP to ensure that a best-practice approach is taken to assess its applications. To address this challenge the ARC engaged us to conduct a comprehensive independent review of the NCGP application and assessment processes.

Our approach

We developed a customised methodology that focused on user-centred design to review the ARC's grant administration process. By engaging with stakeholders to capture their experiences and benchmarking the process against similar granting organisations at national and international levels, we gained a clear understanding of the user experience journey. This enabled us to provide the ARC with a comprehensive set of insights and recommendations on scheme design.

Value-adds

Through continued discussions with the ARC, we gained a deeper understanding of the critical issues affecting the successful transition to a more user-centred grants administration process. As a solution, we proposed the development of a capability framework for the branch responsible for the administration of the NCGP, which aligns with the *ARC Strategy 2022-25*. Our proposal was not only adopted but also implemented across the entire organisation.

Client outcome

The ARC's decision to undertake a review of their NCGP application and assessment processes has led to significant improvements in their ability to support innovative research projects. Through our partnership, they were able to identify areas for improvement and establish a baseline for future measurement. Overall, this has helped to reinforce the ARC as leaders in their field and to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for researchers.

