



Guidelines for peer assessors

November 2023

Introduction

The *Guidelines for Peer Assessors* outline the key features of peer assessment at ANROWS. Peer assessors are expected to engage in all ANROWS peer assessment activities in accordance with these guidelines.

ANROWS peer assessment refers to the independent appraisal of grant applications by others who work, or have worked, in the violence against women field. Peer assessors are selected because of their high level of expertise and leadership in the violence against women field. ANROWS gratefully acknowledges peer assessors' generous contribution of time, expertise, and professional and personal commitment.

The peer assessment process enables ANROWS to assess grant applications impartially and on merit. It also contributes to ensuring the quality of ANROWS's research, products and services. ANROWS's peer assessment process is an open process which includes ANROWS publishing the membership of each peer assessment panel following the release of information about successful projects.

Principles

ANROWS is committed to supporting research integrity and to promoting public trust in its operations. The core principles of the ANROWS peer assessment process are:

1. **Expertise:** Applications are assessed by experts in the field of violence against women.
2. **Fairness:** Applications are assessed and scored against published criteria. The award of grants is based on merit.
3. **Transparency:** ANROWS publishes details of the research program application process, guidelines for peer assessors (including conflict of interest requirements) and, following the award of grants, peer assessment panel membership. Feedback from peer assessors will be provided to applicants.
4. **Impartiality:** To prevent bias or prejudice and ensure impartial assessments, grant applications are assessed by three or more peer assessors. Peer assessors are required to declare any actual or potential conflict of interest through all stages of peer assessment processes. The declarations are managed by ANROWS staff as appropriate.
5. **Confidentiality:** Information provided throughout the peer assessment process will remain confidential.
6. **Ethics:** Peer assessors are bound by a code of conduct. ANROWS has procedures for handling complaints about misconduct, bias or prejudice. Projects which contravene principles of research integrity or research ethics will not be funded.
7. **Quality:** ANROWS only funds projects which are of a high quality.
8. **Efficiency:** Peer assessment of grant applications will be efficient, timely and meet advertised and/or agreed dates with ANROWS.

Peer assessors are expected to engage in all ANROWS peer assessment activities in accordance with these guidelines, including the code of conduct and principles.

In the event that peer assessors identify an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest at any stage in the assessment process, they should:

- identify and discuss that conflict of interest with ANROWS at the earliest opportunity of becoming aware of the conflict
- assist ANROWS in the proper management of that conflict of interest as required.

Peer assessment panels

Each peer assessment panel will include:

- up to two researchers with expertise in domestic, family and/or sexual violence
- one Federal or state/territory policymaker in relevant government departments
- one representative from a domestic, family and sexual violence service provider
- one survivor advocate with lived expertise of domestic, family or sexual violence.

Responsibilities of panel members

Panel members have a period of up to two weeks to individually assess applications prior to panel meetings to finalise advice to ANROWS. Panel members are responsible for:

- reading all applications prior to the panel meetings
- providing a score for each application, with reference to relevant selection criteria
- providing notes and comments (where possible) that may be suitable for feedback to applicants.

Grants round assessment process

The process for assessing and recommending projects for an ANROWS research program is outlined below.

1. **Initial pre-selection of applications:** ANROWS will assess all applications and establish whether they meet minimum grant requirements. Based on this pre-selection, ANROWS will determine the composition requirements of the peer assessment panels and ensure an equitable spread of workload across panels.
2. **Determination of conflicts of interest:** Peer assessors will initially receive a list of applicants to be assessed by their panel (rather than full applications) and be asked to identify and declare any conflicts of interest. Where no conflicts of interest are identified, ANROWS will send full project applications to peer assessors. Where there is a conflict of interest, the ANROWS Director, Research Program will either review the application or invite another peer assessor to do so.
3. **Scoring of applications:** Peer assessors will score each application against the selection criteria, and prepare feedback on the peer assessment form provided.
4. **Assessment form review:** ANROWS staff will review the completed assessment forms and tally scores. ANROWS staff may contact peer assessors to discuss their evaluations. ANROWS staff will prepare a report to the ANROWS Board with a recommended program of funding based on the most highly ranked applications and available budget. Only projects that are recommended or highly recommended by at least four of the five panellists will be considered for funding.
5. **Determination of projects to be funded:** Projects to be funded will be determined by the ANROWS Board. Highly recommended or recommended projects that are not funded may be waitlisted for funding, should additional funds be available in future.
6. **Notification of successful applicants:** ANROWS will notify successful applicants of the decision in relation to their application. This will be under embargo until research agreements have been signed with all successful applicants and the research program can be announced. A breach of the embargo may result in the withdrawal of a grant offer.
7. **Preparation and signing of research agreements:** ANROWS will prepare funding agreements to be signed by both parties for each successful project. These agreements will include a schedule containing reporting milestones and deliverables.

8. **Notification of unsuccessful and waitlisted applicants:** ANROWS will advise all unsuccessful and waitlisted applicants of the outcome of the assessment process prior to the announcement of the funded research program.
9. **Publication of successful grants on the ANROWS website:** Information about successful projects will be published on the ANROWS website, including the project title, research team and a brief project summary. Peer assessment panel membership will also be published at this stage.

Code of conduct

ANROWS's research integrity is enhanced and supported by peer assessors' evaluation of and recommendations about projects. Peer assessors have a responsibility to:

- be familiar with the ANROWS's grants round selection criteria
- respond to the request to contribute to the peer assessment panel process in a timely manner
- declare if they are unable to participate in a peer assessment panel due to insufficient subject matter expertise or any other reason
- declare all conflicts of interest which may become evident at any time during the assessment process
- assess and score the applications according to the selection criteria
- keep all details of applications confidential, including details of the assessment and selection
- not make contact with any applicants without prior agreement from the ANROWS Director, Research Program
- ensure that if at any time during the assessment process an applicant makes, or attempts to make, direct contact with a peer assessor about the assessment process, the peer assessor informs the ANROWS Director, Research Program of the contact at the earliest opportunity
- not take advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer assessment process.

Confidentiality, privacy and information accountability

The following guidelines ensure transparency and integrity of the process, and that funding and assessment processes reflect national and international standards.

- **Confidentiality:** Activities of ANROWS peer assessors are not to be disclosed to anyone outside of ANROWS without prior permission from ANROWS's CEO or Director, Research Program.
- **Privacy:** Peer assessors must observe and comply with relevant Commonwealth and New South Wales privacy laws, including the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and the *Privacy Act 2009* (NSW).¹ They must adhere to the standards contained in these laws for the collection, storage, use and disclosure of any personal information obtained in the course of their duties as peer assessors.
- **Information accountability:** All records of the assessments undertaken by peer assessors, including members' notes and outcome records, will be stored electronically by ANROWS for a period of seven years following the date of the publication of outcomes of each grants round.

¹ ANROWS requires adherence to New South Wales privacy law due to ANROWS's office being located in Sydney.

Conflicts of interest

The integrity of ANROWS's peer assessment process depends on a consistent and transparent response to perceived, potential and actual conflicts of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest arises in any situation in which a peer assessor has an interest which may influence, or be perceived to influence, the proper performance of their responsibilities to ANROWS. This may include situations where assessors:

- are employees of the applicant's organisation or sit on the board of management of the applicant's organisation
- mentor or are a mentee of the applicant
- have co-researched or published with the applicant in the last three years
- are partners or business associates of the applicant, or a person with whom the applicant has had a professional, business or financial involvement
- sit on the advisory group or steering committee of the proposed project
- are relatives, friends or other personal associates of the applicant
- have personal, political, ideological, academic or intellectual competing interests or disputes with applicants which are relevant to the project.

Managing conflicts of interest

Peer assessors should declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest to ANROWS at the earliest opportunity, preferably at the beginning of an assessment process, or as soon as they become apparent. A conflict of interest does not automatically exclude a peer assessor from participation in the proposed activity. The ANROWS Director, Research Program will assess the nature of the conflict and, if substantial, involve the ANROWS CEO in the matter for a decision. ANROWS manages conflicts of interest in line with the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia's *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.²

Further information

For further information about any aspect of ANROWS peer assessment, please contact ANROWS at research@anrows.org.au

² National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia. (2018). *Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research*. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/grant%20documents/The-australian-code-for-the-responsible-conduct-of-research-2018.pdf>