1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The ADSUN Innovation Grant is designed to strengthen national collaboration and enhance research and development capabilities within Australia's defence sector. Jointly delivered by the Defence Innovation Network (DIN) and the Defence Science Institute (DSI), the program promotes cross-institutional and cross-state partnerships by connecting researchers from DIN and DSI member universities to co-develop innovative solutions aligned with Defence's Innovation, Science and Technology (IS&T) priority areas.

The grant supports multi-disciplinary teams to undertake feasibility studies focused on early-stage research at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1 to 5, over a period of 12 to 18 months. The program aims to validate the scientific and technical potential of novel concepts, helping bridge the gap between fundamental research and practical defence applications. Projects are expected to generate promising outcomes that position them for further investment and development beyond the grant's completion.

2. ABOUT THE GRANT

2.1. The ADSUN Innovation Grant supports multi-disciplinary collaborations between academics from DIN and DSI member universities, industry and other Australian universities to accelerate the translation of technologies into defence capability.

2.2. Applicants should scope project proposals only within the problem statement published in the call for proposals.

2.3. The funding scheme is administered by the Defence Innovation Network and the Defence Science Institute.

3. FUNDING

3.1. $1,200,000 is available to support R&D projects aligned with the published topics.

3.2. DIN and DSI will support a project with eligible costs to a maximum of $400,000 scoped for 12–18 months. The project budget will be assessed on merit, and the panel reserves the right to amend project funding.

3.3. To ensure equitable collaboration, funding must be evenly distributed between DIN and DSI member institutions. For example, a project awarded $400,000 must allocate $200,000 to DIN-affiliated university partners and $200,000 to DSI-affiliated university partners.

4. ELIGIBILITY

4.1. Proposals must demonstrate multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional collaboration. Projects must be led by a DIN or DSI member university with substantive inputs from at minimum one DIN member university and one DSI member university, as listed in section 4.9.

4.2. DIN encourages the participation of diverse project teams in the funding program. Gender, culture, and career seniority diversity of project teams are strongly encouraged.

4.3. Project teams may include academics from other states or other research organisations across the Australian Defence Science and Universities Network (ADSUN). However, limited funding is available to support research at non DIN and DSI universities.

4.4. Accordingly, projects involving non DIN and DSI institutions should only rely on key person contributions in exceptional circumstances and where the capability is absent from DIN or DSI member universities. The contributions of such institutions will be governed by terms consistent with those governing DIN member institutions.

4.5. Industry involvement and co-funding are strongly encouraged but are not necessary for a successful proposal. Similarly, strong connections with the Defence Science and Technology Group or the Australian Defence Force are favourable.

4.6. The lead organisation must submit the application on behalf of all project partners. Applicants are required to nominate a lead university in each participating state, responsible for managing the grant within their respective network.

4.7. All proposals must be approved and supported by each university participating in the project. Researchers must connect with the university coordinators listed in section 4.9 to receive support letters for their applications.

4.8. To be eligible, participating researchers must pass due diligence checks. Universities can decline support for researchers where there is a risk that researchers might be involved in activities of security concern. These concerns could include, but are not limited to involvement in, or support or advocacy of, any act of espionage, foreign interference, attacks on Australia's Defence system, or serious threats to Australia's territorial or border integrity; or any employment or service, whether compensated or voluntary, with the government of a foreign country, or any foreign national, organisation or other entity. Universities are required to promptly disclose any information regarding such concerns to DIN and DSI who reserve the right to deny or terminate the participation of researchers in the program.

4.9. Eligible Lead organisations

Defence Innovation Network – New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory

- Australian National University /Lorena Sciusco /
- Charles Sturt University /Matthew Hof/
- Macquarie University /Matt van Breugel/
- University of New South Wales /Joshua Sherman/
- University of Newcastle /Joss Kesby/
- University of Sydney /Adeline Williams /
- University of Wollongong /Robert Beretov/
- University of Technology Sydney /Thomas Leoni/
- Western Sydney University /Andre Urfer/

Defence Science Institute – Victoria and Tasmania

- Australian Catholic University /Shona Halson
- Deakin University /James Mullins
- Federation University /Sean Muller
- La Trobe University /Jessica Ware
- Monash University /Mandy Ross
- RMIT University /John Besida
- Swinburne University of Technology /Richard Hebden
- University of Melbourne /Peter Lee
- University of Tasmania /Megan Dean
- Victoria University /Rezaul Begg

4.10. Eligibility of individual researchers

- All project participants must be citizens of the Five Eyes Alliance (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) or NATO member countries.
- Citizens of possibly allied countries not covered by the named treaties are subject to approval by DIN and DSI.
- All project participants must prove their citizenship by providing a copy of their passport or other acceptable forms of citizen identification with their application.
- Individual researchers may participate in only one application.

4.11. Eligible Industry partners*

- DIN and DSI encourage industry participation in these university-led projects.
- To be eligible, industry partners must have an Australian Business Number and must be registered as a company (individuals, partnerships and trusts do not qualify as industry partners) and have a physical presence in Australia.
- Employees of the industry partner associated with the project will be subjected to the same restrictions as listed in clauses 4.10 and 5 and any other conditions imposed by the Defence.
- IP arrangements with industry partners must be such that the IP and manufacturing or production of any good flowing from the project remain in Australia.
- Allied defence organisations may be eligible to participate and will be considered case-by-case.

** Note: Eligibility criteria and final security requirements for each project will be determined in consultation with Defence but will, at a minimum, include the specified criteria above.*

5. OBLIGATIONS OF PROJECT PARTNERS

- All project participants must agree to terms that restrict access to the R&D data and other Intellectual Property (IP) to the nominated team members and must use air-gap computers, excluded from networks and the internet, to conduct the project work.
- Any additional team members must be approved by DIN and DSI and must agree to any and all terms contained in the primary contract between the parties.
- Intellectual Property (IP) and manufacturing or production must remain in Australia unless otherwise agreed.
- All participants must assign or have assigned IP to the Institution either by virtue of employment contracts or by separate agreements.
- Participants must gain a minimum of Entry Level Membership through the Defence Industry Security Program (DISP) within twelve months of the commencement of the project.
- Participants must keep their involvement in the Initiative confidential unless advised otherwise. In line with Defence guidelines, the identities of successful teams may not be made public. Any announcements of successes will be only general.

6. USE OF FUNDS

6.1. Funding from the DIN and DSI will take the form of a cash contribution following the execution of multi-institutional funding agreements between participating organisations.

6.2. The funding will be paid to the lead organisation. The Leading organisation is responsible for distributing the funds to Collaborating organisations.

6.3. Funds must be used to support the research project described in the application directly and can include the following items:

- *Direct salary costs* for employees working on the project, including chief investigators, early career researchers, research assistants etc. Where chief investigator salaries are claimed, this must be specifically justified and is subject to approval. It is preferred that the funds are used for research associates and –fellows working directly on the project rather than CI salaries.
- *On-cost salary expenses* up to a maximum of 30% of direct salary costs and consistent with the university policies. On-costs must be itemised in the application and can only include the following items: superannuation, payroll tax, payroll tax on superannuation, workers' compensation, long service leave, and maternity leave.
  Universities must submit their on-cost salary expenses itemised by each category as an attachment to the application form, demonstrating compliance with this directive.
- *Computers* that are network and internet incapable or entirely excluded from networks and the internet. Each participating team must make provision for a minimum of one secured

computing item per group, preferably one per participating university institution within a team.

- *Equipment, software, material and consumables* essential for the project. Funding will not be provided for equipment and consumables for general use or already held by the university.
- *Travel costs* essential to the project for the employees working on the project.
- *Stipends or top-ups for HDR students* working on the project. However, given the term of the projects (12-18 months), budget line items for PhD stipends must be specifically justified and are subject to approval.

6.4. Budget items that are **NOT** supported by the funding and should **NOT** be requested in the budget include:

- *Infrastructure (overhead) costs* related to the general operations of the university shared among projects and functions
- *Costs not directly related to the project,* including but not limited to conference fees, workshop expenses, entertainment costs, professional membership fees, professional development courses, visas, relocation costs, insurance and other indirect costs

6.5. Applicants must itemise all expenses in the budget section of the grant application. Grant funds must be spent in accordance with the budget, and any requests for variations must be made in writing to the DIN or DSI and approved in advance.

6.6. The funding committee reserves the right to tailor funding support according to what it believes is required to deliver the project.

7. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

7.1. Applications will be assessed against information and evidence provided in relation to the following selection criteria. Applicants should also take note of the instructions and guidance to reviewers below.

- **Vision, Ambition & Innovation (25%)**
  The proposal must articulate how the project will address the significant step change in translating science and technology and should be ambitious and transformative. Novelty and potential to become world-leading will be demonstrated by Technical / Scientific Merits.

- **Leadership & Team Quality (25%)**

  The proposal must bring together the best team available. It should present a robust and multi-disciplinary genuine partnership of researchers (and industry partners as relevant) with the necessary skills and established track record of pertinent technology research. This is supported by an accurate, comprehensive and compelling analysis of requisite skills and capabilities. Consider the production of a prototype and the potential engineering skills that may be required to create a prototype.

- **Impact (25%)**

  The proposal must demonstrate who will benefit from the research and how they will benefit, including a demonstration of how the research will address critical challenges and needs of the Defence. Plans should be described to disseminate results (subject to any security or IP restrictions), exchange knowledge, attract further investment and build collaborations.

- **Commitment of collaborators (25%)**

  The proposal must demonstrate strong commitment from involved parties.

8. APPLICATION PROCESS

8.1. Applicants must submit their proposals in response to the topics published in the open call on the website www.defenceinnovationnetwork.com

8.2. **Completed application must be submitted by 5 pm (AEST), 11 August 2025 to info@defenceinnovationnetwork.com.**

8.3. DIN and DSI can connect researchers looking for collaborators on request before the application closing date.

9. SELECTION PROCESS

9.1. Applications that have conformed to the application process requirements and are deemed to be within the scope of the call will be subjected to a competitive review process. Peer reviewers, including DSTG experts, provide their recommendations to the ADSUN Technical Review Panel.

9.2. The ADSUN Technical Review Panel will be consist of selected representatives from the DIN and DSI Steering Committee, experts from DSTG, and any additional co-opted members as deemed appropriate.

9.3. The DIN Steering Committee (or its delegated sub-committee) will make final decisions relating to the funding of projects based on recommendations of the ADSUN Technical Review Panel.

9.4. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications and whether or not they are successful.

9.5. The indicative timeline for the selection process is outlined below and may be adjusted as necessary.

30 June 2025	Call for proposals is published
8 July 2025	Info Webinar
11 August 2025	Proposals due date
August- September 2025	Assessment process
25 September	Results Announcement
October - December 2025	Contracting
1 January 2026	Project start

10. FUNDING AGREEMENT, REPORTING REQUIREMENTS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

10.1. Successful applicants who accept a grant offer must enter into legally binding grant agreements. The agreements will specify the obligations and accountabilities of the recipient. Each network will be responsible for executing funding agreements with its respective member universities.

10.2. Intellectual Property (IP) generated through the project will be owned by the participating organisations, in accordance with their internal negotiations and collaborative agreements. All participating universities must sign the Defence IP Deed, which grants Defence rights to access and use the project IP.

10.3. Where an industry partner is involved in the project, the lead university will be responsible for negotiating and executing any necessary agreements with the industry party on behalf of the project team.

10.4. Projects must not start until agreements are fully executed.

10.5. The lead organisations will be required to provide a final report to each network within two months of the project's end date.

10.6. Final and mid-term reports consist of a Technical Report and Financial acquittal. The lead organisation submits the financial acquittal for the project as a whole, including the financial acquittal of Collaborating organisations.

10.7. Following project completion, the team will also be required to organise a demonstration or presentation of the developed capability to the networks and their defence and industry stakeholders. This event will serve as an opportunity to showcase project outcomes and explore pathways for further collaboration or transition.

10.8. All expenditures must be in accordance with the project description and broad structure of the proposed project cost detailed in the proposal. The Lead organisation must retain the evidence of the expenditure.

10.9. All changes to the project timeline, staffing, costs or roll-over of the funds must be justified and approved in writing by the respective network.

10.10. Any material or research findings published in respect of the Joint ADSUN Innovation Grant must include an acknowledgement in the form: *"We thank the Defence Innovation Network, the Defence Science Institute for financial support of this project funded by the Joint ADSUN Innovation Grant."*

ANNEXURE A: GUIDELINES FOR EXPERT PANEL REVIEWERS

Reviewers will be asked to agree to confidentiality terms. Reviewers must not correspond with applicants or interested parties regarding the proposal during, or after, the review process.

ADSUN networks will attempt to select reviewers with no conflict of interest. Where a reviewer believes they have a conflict of interest, no review is required, but an explanation of the conflict of interest is requested. In such cases, an alternate reviewer will be sources. Conflicts of interest may be:

- **Direct**; i.e. you are an interested party in a proposal;
- **Indirect**; i.e. 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 direct or indirect involvement with a competing bid or business activity.

Reviewers are asked to apply judgment when assessing science excellence and impact relative to the research stage and the area of impact. In principle, networks will co-fund research at any TRL, which can be thought of as generating new ideas, developing emerging concepts, and leveraging proven ideas.

Reviewers should assess the proposal against the supplied criteria and are expected to objectively appraise it against these criteria, i.e., undertake their assessments following the direction in these guidelines. An assessment template is provided, and reviewers are asked to assess only against the specific criteria. Reviewers should use the information contained in the application and the supplied supporting documentation and may, in addition, employ any other information of relevance to make the assessment. If additional information is used in the assessment process, reviewers should keep a record of this information and its origin, and disclose it as evidence to the Technical Review Panel.

Reviewers should provide explanatory text to support their assessment, including references to supporting key evidence, such as scientific publications, strategic guidance documentation, patent information, etc. It is vital that their comments support your score, reflect the assessment, and are accurate, professional, and honest.

ANNEXURE B: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

A. POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY /assessed by the Technical Review Panel/

You may wish to consider:

- Has the applicant clearly articulated how this opportunity can be transformative for Defence or the defence industry in the future?
- Is the proposed implementation pathway credible relative to the proposed research stage, bearing in mind the TRL or the research?
- Are the scale and breadth of proposed benefits credible given the area of impact, and are these consistent with the outcomes of the proposal?

'Implementation pathways' are expected to demonstrate that the proposal has considered specifics or mechanisms by which outputs may eventually become implemented or commercialised.

The credibility of indicative implementation pathway(s) to deliver benefits to Australia will be assessed, and may not be limited to a single industry partner or end-user and may be uncertain in nature. A 'credible' implementation pathway analysis will consider the characteristics of the end-use area and is not a generic description.

The information sought is indicative only but should nonetheless impart confidence that the research team has considered this aspect, even though the information may be tentative and uncertain. It is recognised that early-stage investigations are likely to have less concrete implementation pathways with higher-level details at the generic beneficiary and end-user level, while more advanced (i.e. higher TRL, near-to-market) studies will present a clearer view of a pathway to impact and implementation.

'Impact' will be measured by one or more of the scale, extent, and urgency of Defence need or transformative nature of the outputs (i.e. creating new technologies or solutions altogether).

'Scale' means the size, or how much, the outcomes will benefit Australia and Defence.

'Extent' means how widely the outcomes will benefit Australia or Defence.

For example, a given technology may require only five units in any given Defence Force. Hence, the associated outcomes of this technology will be small (unless it is of very high value). If the technology is of such a nature that it is likely to be taken up by every Defence Force in which it can be implemented, then it will have a vast extent of coverage.

'Urgency of defence need' can be measured against expressed priority areas, such as in the 2024 National Defence Strategy or via other mechanisms.

A proposal that demonstrates high impact would receive the following type of comment:

The potential benefits are enormous and have impacts that are nationally significant across the whole of a sector or several sectors. The estimates of benefits are credible and clearly described. The proposed implementation pathways are of an extremely high standard and completely credible, and the supporting information is satisfactory in scope.

B. NOVELTY AND POTENTIAL TO BECOME WORLD-LEADING; TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY AND RISK; BEST COLLABORATIVE TEAM

/assessed by expert reviewers/

What is the quality of the proposed research, science, technology, or related activities?

You may wish to consider particularly:

- **The novelty and originality of the proposal**- the idea itself does not have to be novel, but the sum of the concept and the application must be distinctive. We are looking for 'fresh thinking' rather than an obvious extension of existing research. If you are aware of similar work, please provide a reference. Similar work will not necessarily disqualify a proposal. Please bear in mind that the proposals seek to produce a prototype, i.e. advancing the technology, not specifically the science.
- **The scientific credibility of the idea and its logic-** is the scientific basis for the concept established well in the proposal?
- **The quality of the science, description of critical steps (including go/no-go steps), and methodology-** is the proposed research fit for the purpose of the proposed outcome and impact sought?
- **The degree of scientific rigour**, e.g., the accuracy of the approach and hypothesis. Please advise how either might be improved.
- **The scientific risks and uncertainties identified in the proposal include** any omissions and how they are managed. Are the timescales realistic? Is the size of the risk and plans to mitigate that risk consistent with the stage of research?
- **Team composition-** is the analysis of necessary skills and competencies complete and satisfactory? Does the team represent a collaborative effort between DIN member universities? Do the team members possess the necessary expertise consistent with the needs of the project? Does the team have the required skills and track record to deal with the project? Is the analysis of the required skills and team composition compelling and complete? Are senior researchers participating in a capacity (FTE) that allows them to adequately mentor junior researchers?

When reading the proposal, it would be valuable if you could consider the following questions in your scoring and commentary:

- Comment on the strengths and highlights of the proposed research.
- Highlight the deficiencies or weaknesses of the proposed research.
- Were there any concerns or issues around the proposed research relating to the technical part, team, prior events, existing technologies, or existing knowledge/ research?

C. RANKING SYSTEM

IMPACT- POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY (25%)

- **[0] None:** The proposal demonstrates low impact and/or a poorly articulated implementation pathway.
- **[1] Low:** The proposal shows some impact and/or a reasonably well-developed implementation plan.
- **[2] Good:** The impact is likely to be significant, and the implementation plan is credible.
- **[3] Outstanding:** There is likely to be a high impact if successful, and the implementation plan is clear, credible and contains specific and detailed end-use information.

EXCELLENCE

NOVELTY AND POTENTIAL TO BECOME WORLD-LEADING – BEARING IN MIND THE INTENTION IS TO PRODUCE A PROTOTYPE DEVICE (25%)

- **[0] None:** Is routine and presents little or no novelty.
- **[1] Low:** Displays some novelty, but the outcomes are likely to be incremental.
- **[2] Medium:** Is differentiated will lead to notably improved technology.
- **[3] High:** A distinctive approach that is highly likely to produce leading innovations or capabilities.

TECHNICAL/SCIENTIFIC MERITS; SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RISK (SCIENCE COMPONENT) – BEARING IN MIND THE INTENTION IS TO PRODUCE A PROTOTYPE DEVICE (25%)

- **[0] Low:** The proposal is uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses or flaws, such as a poorly developed or costed plan, no demonstrated ability for the investigators to deliver on the proposed research, or a lack of novelty or value. Risks are poorly articulated or are unmitigated.
- **[1] Moderate:** An interesting proposal. Developing expertise amongst investigators. Some concerns are about either the resource estimate or the ability of the researchers to deliver based on their understanding of the state of the art or their track record. The proposal may lack a compelling element. Risks are partly identified or inadequately mitigated. The risks outweigh the benefits.
- **[2] Good:** High-quality research and a strongly competitive proposal. Investigators have provided evidence of previous ability to deliver. Risks have been well articulated and mitigated, although some residual risks might remain. The potential benefits outweigh the potential risks.
- **[3] Outstanding:** Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research in the field. Well budgeted for the proposed statement of work. Sound track record of investigators. Risks have been adequately identified and mitigated.

TEAM TECHNICAL/SCIENTIFIC MERITS; COLLABORATION AND TRACK RECORD – AT MINIMUM, THE TEAM MUST COMPRISE OF COLLABORATORS FROM TWO MEMBER UNIVERSITIES. (25%)

- **[0] None:** The team does not meet the minimum eligibility requirement
- **[1] Low:** The team has inadequate expertise to lead to a successful outcome or is significantly flawed in its composition.
- **[2] Good:** The team consists of lead researchers from different institutions (with or without students, research associates) with fit-for-purpose expertise.
- **[3] Excellent:** The team has been assembled to encapsulate the best expertise across the DIN.

ASSESSMENT FORM

Application Number:

Title:

Reviewer Name: _____

Reviewer's Institution: _____

Criterion 1 – **Impact and implementation pathway**

Ranking (circle one): 0 1 2 3

Criterion 2 - **Novelty and potential to become world-leading**

Ranking (circle one): 0 1 2 3

Criterion 3 – **Technical and Scientific Merit/ Scientific and Technical Risk**

Ranking (circle one): 0 1 2 3

Criterion 4 – **Team Collaboration and Expertise, including analysis of requisite skills**

Ranking (circle one): 0 1 2 3

Main strength

Please provide a brief comment (25-50 words), regarding the main strength of the proposal. Please provide constructive and respectful comments as these will be provided to applicants as feedback.

Main weakness

Please provide a brief comment (25-50 words), regarding the main weakness of the proposal. Please provide constructive and respectful comments as these will be provided to applicants as feedback