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Royal Australian College *of* General Practitioners

Education Research Grant program 2020

RACGP application guide

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Education Research Grant program 2020: RACGP application guide

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.

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Overview

The Education Research Grant (ERG) program aims to continue building research capacity in medical education and training with a specific focus on education improvement. The overarching objective is to develop evidence-based education initiatives that increase training capacity and improve educational outcomes in Australian general practice training. Via a competitive process, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) awards up to eight grants annually to Regional Training Organisations (RTOs) that partner with academic institutions.

Further information and updates on the application process for the RACGP ERG 2020 round are available at www.racgp.org.au/education/registrars/fellowship-pathways/australian-general-practice-training-program-agpt/education-research-grants

RACGP contact details and support

For additional information and enquiries, please email Education Research Coordinator, Tricia Quek, at gpedresearch@racgp.org.au or telephone 03 8699 0584.

Purpose

The ERG program provides an opportunity for RTOs to establish, develop and maintain research partnerships with primary healthcare academic institutions in their training footprint.

The overarching aims of the ERG program are to:

- produce high-quality research evidence regarding general practice education in Australia
- develop research skills of RTO staff, medical educators, general practice registrars, general practice supervisors and training practices, and promote a culture of academic critique and use of evidence in general practice training
- facilitate collaboration between RTOs, training practices and universities
- promote the dissemination of Australian general practice education research outcomes in Australia to ensure this research is used in general practice training programs.

How does the ERG program work?

Funding of up to $150,000 will be provided to successful research teams to undertake research to improve general practice medical education training. The funded research period runs for one year. Successful 2020 ERG projects commence on 1 January 2020 and conclude on 31 December 2020.

The RACGP will facilitate a number of research support activities for grant holders during the ERG research year to ensure the attainment of program objectives. The RACGP expects that two members of each ERG research team will participate in these activities, and at least one delegate attending the support activity must be an RTO employee. Activities include face-to-face workshops, webinars and conference attendance. All costs associated with attending these activities will be funded by the RACGP.

The RACGP expects that the grant holders will disseminate and publish their project findings during and beyond the funded research period. Most commonly this is done through conference presentations, or publishing findings in a peer-reviewed academic journal or a report accessible on the RTO's website. The RACGP will remain in contact with the RTO project lead beyond the research funded period to assist with results dissemination through RACGP media and communications channels.

ERG application form

The application submission period for the ERG 2020 round is from 1 July to 23 August 2019. RTOs must submit applications online via the Smarty Grants portal link on the ERG website. A link to the form and to the Smarty Grants submission portal will be available at www.racgp.org.au/education/registrars/fellowship-pathways/australian-general-practice-training-program-agpt/education-research-grants during the submission period.

Please note that each project application through the online portal must be managed by a single team member who has the authority from the RTO to submit the application. As the grant application requires collaboration between multiple stakeholders, interested RTOs will be sent a Microsoft Word version of the application form at the beginning of the application period. This will allow applicants to distribute the form to their teams for input, then a nominated team member can transpose the collated submission content into the online form.

There will not be an Expression of Interest period for 2020 applications. The RACGP will conduct an application Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) webinar in the last week of July 2019 to answer queries about the application process and selection criteria. Applicants are encouraged to submit any questions they would like answered prior to the webinar via email to gpedresearch@racgp.org.au

Application process

1 Consider your research proposal topic

- Initiate discussion with your RTO education researchers on potential project topics.
- Ensure that your research area will be relevant to the broader Australian general practice education research landscape.
- Ensure that the proposed project addresses a general practice training policy research priority (Appendix A).
- Consider the scope of your proposed project and if it can be successfully completed within the ERG-funded research period.

2 Obtain support from your RTO

- Ensure that you have the support and approval required within your RTO to complete the application.
- Confirm which RTO staff member will be the project's lead investigator.

3 Link with partners

- Consider which partnerships would strengthen your application and facilitate research capacity building within your RTO.
- Ensure at least one of your partners is a university general practice department, primary healthcare department, or equivalent.
- Confirm what roles your partners will have in maintaining direct and ongoing involvement in the project.

4 Attend the ERG application webinar in July 2019

- Register your interest to attend by emailing gpedresearch@racgp.org.au
- Submit a question to gain clarification on the application process.

5 Begin the online application

- Ensure your application addresses the selection criteria listed in this application guide.
- Ensure that your university partner contributed to, and comprehensively reviewed, your research proposal. A common error is applications submitted without their university partner review, which results in applications not meeting the required standard.

6 Submit application by 5.00 pm AEST, 23 August 2019

Selection criteria

For the 2020 grant round, the RACGP has revised this application guide and application form so that both contain more information regarding the standard required by the Academic Assessment Panel (AAP). We encourage applicants to refer to this guide when completing the application form.

Applicants with less research experience are encouraged to submit an application and to contact the RACGP if they require assistance in developing their research proposal or have any questions regarding obtaining ethics approval for their project.

The RACGP receives more applications than grants available, so RTOs are encouraged to allow plenty of time to prepare the application. The criteria that the AAP uses to assess applications is included in this application guide.

Criterion 1 – Eligibility

The proposal must be an RTO-led project with a clear academic institution partnership. The application must demonstrate:

- that an RTO will be actively leading the research project
- how the university's general practice department, primary healthcare department or equivalent will be involved directly in the project.

Criterion 2 – Meets ERG program objectives

The application must demonstrate:

- how the proposal builds on, or questions, existing academic national and international literature, and knowledge and assumptions about Australian general practice training
- how the project is relevant to national general practice training
- that it addresses a general practice training policy research priority (Appendix A)
- that it is feasible to complete the project within the time available
- a commitment by the RTO and their research partners to disseminate the results and implications for training, including publishing in peer-reviewed journals
- how the research project will develop research capacity within the RTO; if external contractors or research partners will be performing significant roles in the research project, applicants should explain how their input will translate to increasing research capacity within the RTO.

In addition to the Criterion 2 objectives, particular topics have been identified as key research priorities by the RACGP. Research outcomes that address these topics will directly support and inform current RACGP education program and policy development. The topics have been mapped to the existing Department of Health general practice training policy research priorities in Table 1. Favourable consideration will be given to applicants that demonstrate how their proposal links to the RACGP education research priorities. For further details of how RACGP education research priorities link to the national general practice training policy research priorities, refer to Appendix A.

The RACGP education research priority topics are as follows.

- **Exploring tools for in-training and progressive assessment** – examining both formative assessment (to improve trainee performance) and summative assessment (to develop tools for examination purposes).
- **Strategies to promote rural generalism** – examining international perspectives and models that will lead to promotion strategies of rural generalism in the Australian general practice landscape.
- **Exploring predictive ability of Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program selection modalities** – assessing how current assessments predict difficulties in practice or training (eg poor communication and teamwork, unsatisfactory professional conduct or duty of care).
- **Capturing learning throughout the GP's professional lifespan (pre-vocational to post-Fellowship)** – examining international perspectives and proposing portfolio applications for the Australian general practice landscape.
- **Increasing general practice supervisor and medical educator workforce and sustainability** – improving understanding of medical educator and general practice supervisor characteristics that will lead directly to increased recruitment, retention and training of GPs for these roles.
- **Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for success in the AGPT Program** – how to assess a registrar to ensure they have acquired sufficient skills from hospital training time before commencing GPT1.
- **Enhancing research capacity in general practice** – how to identify and develop opportunities to increase research capacity in GPs to enable them to routinely use these skills in clinical work.

Table 1. Mapping RACGP research priorities to general practice training policy research priorities

RACGP research priorities	Department of Health general practice training policy research priorities				
	Competency and its measurement in general practice training	Educational quality and its measurements	General practice training: Workforce and sustainability	Outcomes of training	Workplace training: Optimising the experience
Exploring tools for in-training and progressive assessment	X			X	X
Strategies to promote rural generalism			X		X
Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities	X	X		X	
Capturing learning throughout the GP's professional lifespan	X	X		X	X
Increasing general practice supervisor and medical educator workforce and sustainability			X		X
Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for success in the AGPT Program	X			X	
Enhancing research capacity in general practice			X		

AGPT, Australian General Practice Training; GP, general practitioner; RACGP, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Criterion 3 – Research proposal

The AAP will assess if the applicant has clearly and adequately addressed the following components of their research proposal:

- research goal/s and research question/s
- specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound targeted objectives with defined key performance indicators
- background and purpose for the project supported by a literature review and a review of current practice (environmental scan) specific to the project topic
- research design and method that answers the research question
- consideration of ethical issues that may arise from the project and how they may be mitigated
- collaboration
- project governance and management
- project budget.

Guide to writing a successful research proposal

To assist applicants with submitting a successful ERG research proposal we have included the following suggestions for each component assessed by the AAP.

Research aim and research question/s

The application should have a clear and concise project aim and research question. The question would normally be refined after the critical appraisal of the literature and the method design, but typically it is stated at the beginning of a proposal. The background is explained elsewhere.

Each question should define:

- the study population
- the intervention or problem
- any comparison group
- the outcome of interest within a time frame.

Example: How does asthma management for pregnant women impact on pregnancy outcomes?

- Study population = pregnant women who are being treated for asthma
- Intervention = the provision of an asthma management plan
- Comparison group = those who engage in the plan against those who do not
- Outcome = health of mother and/or baby during pregnancy

Research objectives

Research objectives should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. They should have defined key performance indicators. Throughout the term, successful applicants will be required to report on progression towards the achievement of research objectives. Please note that research objectives are **not** project tasks.

Research objectives should:

- link to the research question
- define a specific aim of the study and identify an outcome measure (description, definition, measurement etc)
- begin with an action verb (eg describe, define, measure).

Example

Using the aforementioned research question, the objectives may be to:

- describe and measure the use of asthma management plans by pregnant women seen in general practice

- measure pregnancy outcomes for women who have been treated for asthma in general practice
- determine the impact of an active asthma management plan on pregnancy outcomes
- make recommendations regarding the engagement of pregnant women in the use of active asthma management plans.

Background, purpose and critical appraisal of the literature

Explain the motivation for the research. How was the gap in knowledge identified?

Literature search and appraisal:

- Identify literature specific to the research topic. Include a statement of the criteria used in searching – for example, time period (years of literature relevant to the topic), sources.
- Critically appraise the literature and identify valuable contributions to the field. Start from a broad picture narrowing down to the specific focus of the proposed study. Study limitations and identify gaps in the literature that you hope to address with your research.
- Review current practice (ie conduct environmental scan) specific to the research topic.
- Provide a reference list.

A word limit applies to the literature review and environmental scan in the application. Applicants should be aware that a concise literature review is required for publication, so ability to summarise relevant information on the form is part of the assessment process. Use referencing to direct the reviewer to further information.

Research design and method

Applicants must outline the methodology and explain how the design is appropriate to answer the research question. Where the research links to other projects – either existing or proposed – clearly explain the relationship and boundaries. How will your research add to the project, or how will it differ?

Include justifications for:

- choice of design
- number of participants
- sample size calculations, and so on.

Ethical considerations

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues that may arise from the project and risk mitigation requirements. Include a statement regarding the ethical issues you have identified, and how you will address each of these. Applicants must provide full details to indicate that the ethical issues have been adequately considered. It is not sufficient to say that an ethics committee has already approved the project.

> It is the responsibility of the lead investigator to ensure the conduct of the project complies with all Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements. We encourage applicants to liaise with an HREC before submitting their application, especially to check the level of risk.

The process of ethical review with any HREC often takes longer than anticipated, so be sure to allow adequate time in the work plan. Applicants may apply to the RACGP National Research and Evaluation Ethics Committee (NREEC) for approval of their research.

In regard to participant recruitment, be sure to consider:

- the process of obtaining consent, especially where a power imbalance may exist
- if there is involvement of vulnerable groups – in the ERG context this could be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, or cultural and linguistically diverse populations
- how data and privacy is protected
- appropriate use of reimbursements.

The standard rate of reimbursement provided directly to GPs or general practice registrar participants is approximately $125 per hour; however, the RACGP strongly advises researchers to instead engage with and compensate their participants' GP clinics for the loss of staff time.

For further information, refer to the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* at www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72

Collaboration

> As one of the overarching aims of the ERG program is to facilitate collaboration between RTOs, the RACGP strongly encourages RTOs to consider partnering with other RTOs on ERG projects. This enables comparisons and facilitates mentoring. RTOs are encouraged to consider engaging former academic registrars in the research project where possible.

As per the eligibility criteria, the RTO must partner with a general practice or primary healthcare department within a recognised academic institution. The university partner must have direct and ongoing involvement in the project and provide substantial input into the application, including peer review. The role of the university partner is to mentor the RTO and ensure the application and project are of good quality.

RTOs may also collaborate with other relevant organisations; however, the RTO must have a substantial role in research design, reporting and dissemination. The application form asks for a description of how the collaboration will build research capacity within the RTO.

Project governance and management

Demonstrate a clear project governance structure and identify to whom the project team will report within the RTO. As ERGs are awarded to RTOs, the RTO must nominate an RTO staff member to be responsible for liaison with the RACGP regarding grantee obligations, including reporting. RTOs must inform the RACGP of any delegation of these obligations.

- Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the project team. Designate a lead investigator and a project manager; these roles are permitted to be allocated to one person.
- Clearly identify milestones and timelines, identify risks with mitigation strategies and contingency plans.

You must ensure that your timelines fit within the reporting requirements for the grant – refer to the administration schedule.

Outcomes and results dissemination

Now that you have outlined your research aims and how the project will add new knowledge to the field, consider the deliverables or outcomes that will be generated by your project. Additionally, consider how your project deliverables or outcomes could be extrapolated to become applicable to other RTOs or the AGPT Program – a key aim of the ERGs.

Results dissemination should be given strong consideration during the project planning stage. Think of who will be your target audience, what will be the key messages you want to convey and how you will wish to convey them. Avenues of results dissemination include publishing in a scientific journal, presenting at an industry conference and meeting with your organisation's key policymakers.

Project budget

Provide a project budget that is consistent with the funding inclusions and exclusions. The RACGP will consider funding up to $150,000 (excluding GST) for each successful applicant. Applicants must ensure they can complete the project within the proposed budget. If you have funding from another source, the RACGP will ask you to identify this and explain how you will use the contribution.

To ensure favourable consideration as a ground-up, RTO-driven ERG project, any associated administrative costs should be included at an appropriate RTO level.

Be sure to:

- include full details to justify each expense
- make sure that allowance for salaries and consultants includes the hours employed/engaged over the term and is consistent with information provided in the roles and responsibilities table
- publication costs may be included, providing the expense is projected to be incurred before financial grant reconciliation.

> The ERGs will only provide funding for costs incurred during the funding period, 1 January – 31 December 2020. The AAP will only approve funding applications that meet the selection criteria and application requirements listed below. The project's budget total cannot be changed once it has been approved by the AAP.
>
> Successful grant holders may request an amendment to re-allocate their funds to new or existing line items of the approved budget by writing to gpedresearch@racgp.org.au during the grant period. Amendments must include only items that are consistent with the funding inclusions list.

Funding inclusions:

- salaries for staff undertaking the project (list staffing requirements as percentage of full-time equivalent [FTE])
- travel and meeting costs
- data analysis and data transcriptions
- reasonable recruitment incentives – refer to the guidance provided under the ethical review section
- items related to dissemination of research findings, including poster printing, conference registration, economy flights and accommodation within Australia.

Please note that the ERGs may be used to cover costs related to conference attendance that will occur beyond 31 December 2020 as long as the conference registration and related costs have been booked and paid for during the funded research period. Conference-related costs will only be accepted if conference registration has been paid.

Funding exclusions:

- non-specific administrative overheads
- expenses incurred beyond the project funding period
- ongoing costs associated with resource management and maintenance beyond the project completion date
- physical infrastructure/contribution to large capital projects
- subscriptions or memberships
- items related to international conference attendance.

Applicants must indicate on the RACGP application form if they have also applied for funding for the same project through an Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine ERG. An ERG project group can only accept funding from one college.

Selection process

Academic Assessment Panel (AAP)

The AAP is a selected group of RACGP and external representatives. The main function of the AAP is to assess the suitability of applications submitted for an ERG. At a minimum, the AAP consists of the following organisations and cohorts:

- a representative from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with experience in general practice research
- the RACGP
- Australasian Association of Academic Primary Care
- current/former RTO senior medical educator.

Assessment process

AAP members individually assess and score each of the ERG applications against the selection criteria. At a meeting of the AAP, panel members discuss their assessments and decide whether an application meets the minimum criteria for the grant. The RACGP will offer up to eight ERGs for 2020. In the event that there are more suitable applications than grants available, the panel will rank the applications based on the panel's scoring of each applicant against the selection criteria.

Outcome

The RACGP will notify all applicants on the outcome of their application as well as provide feedback from the AAP. The decisions of the AAP are final and are not subject to appeal.

Contractual arrangements and funding

Funding agreement

The funding agreement is a contract between the RACGP and the RTO that contains the obligations and responsibilities of both parties, and the funding obligations for the completion of the ERG project.

RTO project teams should ensure they understand their responsibilities before an authorised representative of the RTO signs and returns the funding agreement to the RACGP by the specified date.

RTOs receive funding in three stages:

- 50% of the total funded amount on execution of the funding agreement
- 35% of the total funded amount on receipt and approval of the mid-term report signed by the lead investigator
- 15% of the total funded amount (less unspent funds as per financial reconciliation) on receipt and approval of the completed final report and financial reconciliation signed by the lead investigator.

Resource ownership

Physical resources

Where the RTO procures resources on the basis that they are to be shared between project collaborators, the RTO shall bear responsibility for maintaining the resources and the provision of a clear plan for usage and access by all relevant training practices.

Data and information

Data and information collected in the course of this project will be the property of the RTO. The RTO must make available results and outcomes, and general information collected (including literature review and environmental scans) for the RACGP's use, in the context of program policy development, research and marketing purposes.

The RACGP–RTO funding agreement for ERGs specifies that the RTO owns the intellectual property (IP) but grants a perpetual licence to the RACGP to use its IP rights. The licence to the RACGP includes a right to sub-license to the Department of Health.

Administration schedule

ERG applications open	**1 July 2019**
Webinar for RTOs	Week of 29 July 2019
ERG applications close	**5.00 pm AEST, 23 August 2019**
Final outcome letters sent and all funding agreements distributed	6 November 2019
Funding agreements returned to RACGP	18 November 2019
Commencement of ERG-funded research period	**1 January 2020**
ERG projects initial progress report due	13 April 2020
ERG projects mid-term report due	6 July 2020
Conclusion of ERG-funded research period	**31 December 2020**
ERG projects final administrative, research findings and financial reconciliation report due	15 February 2021

Support activities schedule

Note that dates for the support activities are indicative only. The RACGP will provide delegates with a confirmed date and location at least two months before each activity. Research teams are expected to nominate at least two delegates to attend each activity, of which one must be an RTO staff member.

Workshop 1	Early February 2020
Webinar 1	Early April 2020
Webinar 2	Late July 2020
Workshop 2	Late October 2020
Conference attendance (to be determined by the RACGP)	TBC

Appendix A: General practice training policy research priorities

1. Competency and its measurement in general practice training

Rationale

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) standards for education and training require demonstration of assessment of competence, prior to the commencement of GPT1 and throughout training. This is not a new expectation; however, it can be difficult within a Regional Training Organisation (RTO) to develop a well validated and reliable tool to measure competence: the concepts are inherently complex, and the cohort size of a single RTO is small.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- exploring tools to assess competency prior to general practice training
- exploring tools to assess competency during general practice training.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Capturing learning
- Exploring predictive ability of Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program selection modalities
- Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for the AGPT Program

2. Educational quality and its measurement

Rationale

Educational quality is difficult to measure – the field of general practice is broad and diverse, registrars enter the program with different skill sets and learning needs, and interventions are layered and complex. Nevertheless, it is essential that we develop tools to measure quality in general practice education and training. Particular focus on areas that are difficult to assess using quantitative outcome measures, such as the Fellowship exams, is of interest.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- current practice in education quality measurement and quality improvement
- educational evaluation.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities
- Capturing learning

3. General practice training: Workforce and sustainability

Rationale

The medical educator and supervisor workforce across the AGPT Program is diverse and mobile, with many general practitioners (GPs) taking multiple clinical and educational roles. Some research has already been undertaken in this area. However, novel approaches that contribute to an understanding of this complex topic should be considered.

Maldistribution of the medical workforce remains a key issue. An ageing rural medical workforce combined with the increasing trend for medical graduates moving into sub-specialty practice means there has been a decline in generalism that will directly affect rural and remote areas.

Enhancing the research capacity of individual GPs and encouraging the use of research skills in clinical work are essential components to strengthening general practice research and further developing the evidence base for primary care.

Research topics

This priority area has been divided into two sections: understanding the current workforce, and planning the future workforce. Topics within these two areas are set out below.

Understanding current workforce

- Medical educator or general practice supervisor demographics
- Medical educator or general practice supervisor activities and responsibilities
- Medical educator or general practice supervisor work arrangements
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor demographics
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor activities and responsibilities
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor work arrangements

Planning future workforce

- Incentives, motivators and barriers to becoming a medical educator, general practice supervisor, cultural educator or cultural mentor
- Becoming a training practice
- Investigation of alternative models of in-practice training
- Exploring the consultant general practice supervisor model (supervisor funded to oversee multiple learners per session rather than take patient bookings)

Connection to RACGP priorities

- Rural generalism
- Supervisor recruitment, retention and training
- Enhancing general practice research capacity

4. Outcomes of training

Rationale

At the completion of the AGPT Program, some RTOs conduct exit interviews. However, there is currently little follow-up to determine whether training meets the needs of GPs in the early years of Fellowship. There has been some recent discussion among registrars around the need for mentorship in these early years of clinical practice. General practice is also becoming increasingly complex, with a range of higher order skills required.

Skills such as critical thinking, team management and business planning may be 'squeezed out' of the crowded curriculum during general practice training. If we are to adapt the program to meet the needs of recent Fellows, we need to determine what could be incorporated into general practice training, and what could be offered as continuing professional development to early Fellows.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- aspects of training most valuable to future work as a GP
- gaps in training identified through work as a GP
- gaps in clinical experience identified through work as a GP.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities
- Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for the AGPT Program
- Capturing learning

5. Workplace training: Optimising the experience

Rationale

The apprenticeship model of training is historically core to the education of future GPs. However, the experience is rich and diverse, and we know little about how learning occurs in this context. Registrars attend RTO-hosted workshops during their general practice placement, and the workshop content is captured by most training organisations. It is less clear what occurs during 'ad hoc' supervision.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- the need for a core curriculum for general practice supervisors
- professional development for general practice supervisors, medical educators, cultural educators and cultural mentors
- changes in clinical experience as training progresses.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Rural generalism
- Supervisor recruitment, retention and training
- Capturing learning

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