VICTORIA UNIVERSITY RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT GRANTS SCHEME

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INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES FOR 2008

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Victoria University Researcher Development Grants Scheme has been introduced to support Victoria University Early Career Researchers and newly appointed staff to engage in and develop high quality research projects, with preference for teams involving ‘mentors’ and/or strong research collaborations with industry, government and/or the community, to produce research outcomes of high quality and impact. Additional benefits will be the development of an individual’s research track record, and enhanced capacity to attract additional external research income to the University.

1.2 The scheme is administered by the Office for Research in conjunction with faculties and institutes.

1.3 Applications will initially be assessed on a competitive basis by a Panel established by the Faculty, which would normally be chaired by the Faculty’s Associate Dean (Research and Research Training), prior to final ranking by the Grant Scheme Committee, chaired by the DVC (Research and Region).

2 Objectives

The Objectives of the Victoria University Researcher Development Grants Scheme are:

- to support Early Career Researchers showing clear evidence of high research capacity and newly appointed staff without research funding;
- to encourage research in a team including the guidance of an experienced researcher;
- to fund projects that will enable staff to realistically compete for external research support within twelve months after the end of the project;
- to encourage productive research collaborations with industry, government and/or the community;
- to develop research output that will enable high quality applications to be submitted to external grant awarding agencies.
- to encourage novel collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to applied and basic and research problems;
- to fund projects with demonstrable and original research outcomes.

The Scheme does not fund consultancy projects, market research, teaching development or evaluation projects.

3 Definitions

3.1 Early Career Researcher

3.1.1 Early Career Researchers are defined as academic staff in their first five years of uninterrupted academic or research-related employment following completion of their postgraduate training. This definition can also cover applicants who wish to begin a research career after a career in teaching.
3.1.2 Applicants are encouraged to work closely with established researchers or research groups and such applications will be well received. (Such applications do not require established researchers to be included as chief investigators but must include a listed mentor investigator.)

3.2 Newly Appointed Staff

3.2.1 A newly appointed academic staff member up to and including Academic Level D who otherwise meets the eligibility requirements may apply for support provided that their commencement at VU was not earlier than 2 years before the closing date for applications and they do not currently hold, as a Chief Investigator, more than $10,000 of external research funding.

4 Funding

4.1 Grants shall be awarded with a maximum value of $30,000. Grants below $5,000 will not be awarded. Only exceptional applications will receive funding at the upper end of the range.

4.2 The Scheme is intended to support specific research projects and does not fund standard infrastructure (eg. computers), teaching materials, publication costs, conference attendance or fees of students. Support will not be granted for a project where the topic constitutes a student’s higher degree thesis.

4.3 Funding must be for a specific stand-alone project undertaken with goals which can be achieved within one calendar year.

4.4 Grants will be awarded for one year only.

5 Eligibility

5.1 Chief Investigator Eligibility Criteria

5.1.1 Applicants must hold a salaried academic appointment of at least 0.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) at Victoria University. Staff members of the TAFE Division are encouraged to apply.

5.1.2 Applicants should normally hold a PhD at the time of application. Applicants with PhD-equivalent research experience are required to make a case for exemption.

5.1.3 Applicants will not be accepted from academic staff undertaking postgraduate study, where they are seeking support for their own postgraduate research project from this scheme.

5.1.4 Applicants must occupy a continuing or tenured position at Victoria University or be employed on a contract of not less than 3 years duration not expiring earlier than December 2009, unless the Executive Dean of Faculty (or equivalent) is prepared to provide written assurance that the contract will be renewed to meet this requirement. Full time-staff who are employed with funds from external grants are ineligible. This includes any research grant which contains a budget for that person’s salary and/or where that person is employed to undertake a specific project, eg. a Research Associate or Assistant on an ARC grant.
5.1.5 All Chief Investigators should demonstrate in their application that they have the time and basic infrastructure resources to pursue the project concerned, within the context of existing research, teaching and higher degree supervision responsibilities.

5.1.6 Applicants holding appointments classified at Academic Level E are ineligible as sole applicants but are encouraged to team with an ECR. Academic Level D staff are eligible to apply as sole applicants only if they satisfy 3.2 but are also encouraged to team with an ECR.

5.1.7 Applicants with unsubmitted internal grant final reports as at the closing date for applications are ineligible.

5.1.8 Staff who do not fit the above criteria, but believe they can make a compelling argument as to why they should be considered for funding in the context of the objectives of the Scheme may make a one-page, special case in writing to the Faculty Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) and attach this to their application. The special case may include, but is not limited to, circumstances where a person has been at the University longer than five years but where their career has been significantly interrupted or affected by, for example, lengthy serious illness, child bearing or child rearing.

5.1.9 Individuals who hold honorary and visiting appointments with Victoria University or who do not meet the conditions for eligibility outlined above are not eligible to apply as Chief Investigators.

5.2 Partner Investigator Eligibility Criteria (for collaborative projects)

Researchers and organisations external to Victoria University who are providing significant intellectual input and relevant expertise to the project must be listed as Partner Investigators. To be eligible to participate as a Partner Investigator, a researcher/organisation must:

• demonstrate significant intellectual leadership or input into the proposed project; and
• demonstrate a significant contribution of funds or other resources, including his/her own salary, from his/her institution for the proposed project (having regard to the total cost of the project and the relative contribution of each Chief Investigator); and
• provide the University with evidence of approval from his/her employing organisation for participation in the project; and
• have the time and capacity to make a serious commitment to the project. The University deems as appropriate a minimum of two days, out of twenty-one working days per month available for all activities, for each named Chief/Partner Investigator in addition to his/her commitment to activities in the organisation from which s/he predominantly draws his/her salary.

The appropriateness and level of cash and/or in-kind commitment of the Partner Investigator contribution will be taken into consideration by the Committee.

5.3 Limitations and Exclusion Criteria

5.3.1 Limit on Number of Applications Per Round

Chief Investigators may be listed on a maximum of TWO applications. Mentor Investigators may be listed on a maximum of four applications.
5.3.2 Relationship of the Proposal to Other Projects

5.3.2.1 Applications which request funds to supplement another current internal University/external grant or research contract will be excluded from consideration. If an applicant already holds a grant in a related area, the onus is on the applicant to provide sufficient information to assure the Faculty and the Researcher Development Grant Scheme Committee that the Researcher Development grant is not being used to “top up” another existing grant.

5.3.2.2 Applicants who are successful in obtaining Researcher Development funding for 2008/09, and who subsequently win an external Australian competitive grant for funding in 2008/09, will be able to hold both awards, unless it is for the same project.

5.3.3 Ineligible Areas of Investigation or Types of Work

Victoria University Researcher Development Grants do not support the following:
- Production of teaching materials, even though some research may be involved in their production;
- Compilation of data, unless an integral part of a project, in which case applicants must provide a statement indicating the research objectives to which the data would contribute;
- Development of research aids and tools (including computer programs), unless they form an integral part of a project, in which case applicants must provide a statement indicating the research objectives to which these activities would contribute.
- Scholarly investigations which, while important in themselves, do not lead to conceptual advances or discoveries, or to novel practical outcomes or applications. Such projects as uncritical bibliographical compilations and purely descriptive catalogues or editions that do not involve original research are not eligible to be funded.

6 Application Process

6.1 Application Forms

Applications for Victoria University Researcher Development Grants should be made on the appropriate forms that are available from the Office for Research website. If submitting a collaborative grant, the application must include a statement from the industry/commercial/organisational partner that includes the partner’s financial, in-kind and other commitment.

6.2 Project Budget

6.2.1 Construction of Budget

Applicants should avoid devising an “ambit claim” budget in the expectation that the Committee will cut it down to a realistic level. The Committee will recommend funding projects at what it sees to be an appropriate level to allow the project to be undertaken and completed in an efficient and effective manner.

Requests must be grouped under the headings provided “Personnel”, “Equipment,” “Maintenance,” “Travel” and “Other”. Items should be costed at prices that will apply in 2008.

- **Personnel**
  Applicant salaries or time release cannot be requested. Funds cannot be used to support postgraduate student scholarships. Where funding is requested for research staffing, or technical assistance, or other staffing, the salary scales and on-costs current within the university should be used. Salary scales are available from
http://intranet.vu.edu.au/hr/Salaries.asp
On costs of 28% must be added to each personnel item request.

- **Equipment**
  Researchers should plan to use existing equipment wherever possible. The Committee will fund the purchase of equipment costing more than $1,000 only in exceptional cases and where the item of equipment is considered essential for the project and strong justification for its acquisition provided.

- **Maintenance (individual items less than $1,000)**
  Maintenance includes items of equipment costing less than $1,000, consumables, sets of printed material and microfilm and computing, postage, stationery, etc.

- **Travel and Accommodation**
  Only travel directly related to the project will be considered. Travel to attend conferences will not be supported.

- **Other**
  Any other expenditure, including facility time/access charges.

### 6.2.2 Priorities

Each budget item should be given a priority ranking indicating its importance to the successful completion of the project. Two categories should be used:

- **A**: essential for the project to be completed in a timely fashion; or
- **B**: necessary to maintain a reasonable rate of progress in bringing the project to completion.

### 6.3 Closing Date

Applications for the Victoria University Researcher Development Grants Scheme must be received at the Office for Research by **4.00 p.m. on Friday, 18 July 2008**. APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER THIS TIME WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Applicants will be required to submit ONE signed original application form and attachments and 5 copies (identical to original).

### 7 Evaluation and Assessment

#### 7.1 Assessment Process

**7.1.1** Applications will in the first instance be assessed on a competitive basis by a Panel established by each Faculty, in accordance with the objectives of the Scheme and the assessment criteria (see 7.2). Applications from Victoria University Institutes and TAFE will be assigned to a faculty Panel by the Director of the Office for Research. The Panel would normally be chaired by the Faculty’s Associate Dean (Research and Research Training).

The Panel will have no less than three members who will be senior researchers. A Panel member may not also be an applicant for a grant that is to be considered by the Panel. Where an Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) is an applicant for a grant they will withdraw from all considerations of the Panel and nominate to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region), for approval, an alternative chairperson for the Panel.

**7.1.2** Faculties shall rank applications prior to consideration by the Researcher Development Grant Scheme Committee chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region). That Committee shall be appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region) who shall
consult with Deans.

The Committee shall receive advice in writing explaining the Faculty’s assessment and ranking of each proposal.

7.1.3 Where an application is made by two or more researchers from different Faculties, the Associate Deans (Research and Research Training) of the relevant Faculties shall consult and provide coordinated advice to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region).

7.1.4 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region) and members of the Researcher Development Grant Scheme Committee reserve the right to discuss applications, on a confidential basis, with Deans, Associate Deans (Research and Research Training), Heads of Schools, Institute Directors, Centre Directors or other senior colleagues.

7.2 Assessment Criteria

7.2.1 Excellence is the primary criterion for the award of a grant, both in terms of the project and the track record of the researcher(s) relative to opportunity. Consideration will also be given to a significant development of research linkages with external industry/commercial/community organisations; the likelihood that the proposal will provide a real conceptual advance; lead to an important discovery or innovation or the solution of an important practical problem; or, as appropriate, contribute economic or social benefit to Australia.

7.2.2 Assessment of each application by a Faculty Research Panel and the Researcher Development Grant Scheme Committee shall have regard to:

- Researcher development: how the project will contribute to the researcher(s) career development and enhance their competitiveness in securing external funding in the future to support their research program (applicants must include a statement on their plans to secure funding in the future).
- The Quality of the Project: including the significance of the project, and the extent to which the project is soundly conceived and planned.
- Feasibility: the extent to which the project is feasible given the timelines and budget, and the skills, experience and time commitment of the investigators.
- Resources: the extent to which the budget is justified and appropriate.

7.2.3 Scoring System

When assessing applications, a ranking score between 0 – 5 will be applied for each of the primary assessment criteria (7.2.2):

- 0 – deficient
- 1 – marginal
- 2 – average
- 3 – above average
- 4 – superior
- 5 - outstanding

7.3 Feedback

Applicants who are unsuccessful will be invited, via the Office for Research, Grants Administration Officer, to meet with the Panel or a nominated Panel member for feedback.
7.4 Appeals

Appeals will be heard only against process issues and not against evaluative decisions of the Panel or Grant Scheme Committee, nor ratings or comments of the assessors. An applicant may appeal only where there is clear evidence that the process followed has contravened the Guidelines.

Appeals must be lodged, in writing addressed to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region), through the Office for Research, within 28 days of the date on the letter of notification of application outcome. Appeals by other parties on behalf of an applicant will not be considered. Appeals must clearly state the procedural issue on which the appeal is based.

8 Conditions of Award

8.1 Length of Grant

Victoria University Researcher Development Grants are normally provided for a 12 month period. In exceptional cases, an extension of time of up to three months may be granted.

8.2 Final Report

A Final Report will be required at the completion of 12 months, and submitted to the University Research Committee for consideration, or if an extension of time for three months has been granted, within 15 months of grant approval.

8.3 Submission of an application for a National Competitive Grant

An application must be submitted an application to an appropriate significant external funding body (eg ARC, NHMRC, VicHealth) within one year of the completion of the project.

8.4 Nominations to Panels

It is expected that applicants who have been successful in the past in obtaining a National Competitive Grant or a Victoria University Grant will make themselves available for selection as Panel members on a Panel in a subsequent year.

8.5 Failure to comply

Failure to comply with items 8.2, 8.3 or 8.4 will normally exclude a researcher from having any application considered in future years. An excluded researcher may apply in writing to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region) for readmission to the scheme.