



# WA Agricultural Research Collaboration

Innovation • Transformation • Growth

## Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program - *Guidelines for Applicants: Round 3*

March 2026

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# 1. Program overview

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## Introduction

The Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program is an initiative of the State Government-backed WA Agricultural Research Collaboration (WAARC), which aims to strengthen research, development and extension capabilities to help future-proof the State's agriculture and food sector.

WAARC brings together the research strengths of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), CSIRO, Grower Group Alliance (GGA), Curtin University, Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia (UWA) to build additional research capacity and respond to new challenges within primary industries.

WAARC's Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program, with the support of its three university members, aims to provide top-up scholarships for up to 36 eligible PhD students across three years (2024 to 2026). Round 3 (to which these Guidelines apply) opens 25 March 2026.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program include:

- Attracting high-quality applicants to undertake postgraduate research in agriculture and food via PhD top-up scholarships;
- Supporting innovative and industry-focused research that aligns with the priorities of WAARC and the WA agriculture and food sector through the top-up scholarship selection process; and
- Supporting and building capacity of early career agriculture and food researchers in WA by providing a comprehensive program of skills and career development opportunities for the scholarship cohort.

## Eligibility 'at a glance'

Eligibility to apply includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Applicants must nominate to enrol in one of the three WAARC-member universities (Curtin University, Murdoch University or The University of Western Australia).
- Applicants must have commenced or intend to commence their study between 1 January 2026 and 31 December 2026.
- Applicants must demonstrate their research project aligns with one of five priority areas of capacity need for the WA agricultural sector.
- Domestic students are strongly preferred; however international students may still apply.
- Successful recipients must have an industry co-supervisor on their supervisory panel.

For full eligibility details, please see sections below.

## 2. Key dates and the scholarship

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### Key dates

To be eligible for Round 3 of this program, applicants need to complete and submit an application via the DPIRD SmartyGrants platform.

Late submissions will not be accepted.

Round 3 Dates	Date	Time (AWST)
Applications Open	Wednesday, 25 March 2026	9:00am
Applications Close	Wednesday, 29 April 2026	5:00pm
Notification of application results	End-June 2026 (tbc)	

### The scholarship

WAARC, with the support of its three university members, is providing top-up scholarships for up to six eligible PhD students in 2026. Each top-up scholarship will equate to 75% of the Commonwealth full-time base Research Training Program (RTP) stipend rate and will be available for a maximum of 3.5 years from the student's official commencement date.

The top-up scholarship amount for 2026 is \$25,736.25 (75% of \$34,315); pro-rata and will be indexed for subsequent years. For students who begin their PhD before 1 July 2026, payments will start from 1 July 2026, and conclude 3.5 years from their official PhD commencement date.

WAAA, or the Western Australian Agriculture Authority (on behalf of WAARC as administrator of WAARC funds) will enter into individual Research Agreements with the relevant participating university for each successful candidate. Payments will be made to the scholarship participant's host university as per the Research Agreement, and the host university will be responsible for regular stipend payments and for administration of any operating funds.

Scholarship recipients will also become part of a WAARC postgraduate cohort and alumni, with access to a comprehensive program of skills, network and career development opportunities. Program participants may also have access to industry mentors, internships and conference travel.

Please note: Provision of operating funds is not a formal component of the top-up scholarship program and should not be an expectation. If operating funds do become available to scholarship recipients, the amount would not exceed a total of \$10,000 per student over the life of the PhD.

### 3. Support for applicants

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If, after reading the Guidelines in full, you have any queries about the Guidelines or application process, please contact WAARC Capacity Building and Extension Program Lead Jenny Crisp at least two weeks' prior to the closing date: [jenny.crisp@uwa.edu.au](mailto:jenny.crisp@uwa.edu.au)

#### **WAARC**

For more information about WAARC programs and activities, please see the WAARC website: [waarc.org.au](http://waarc.org.au)

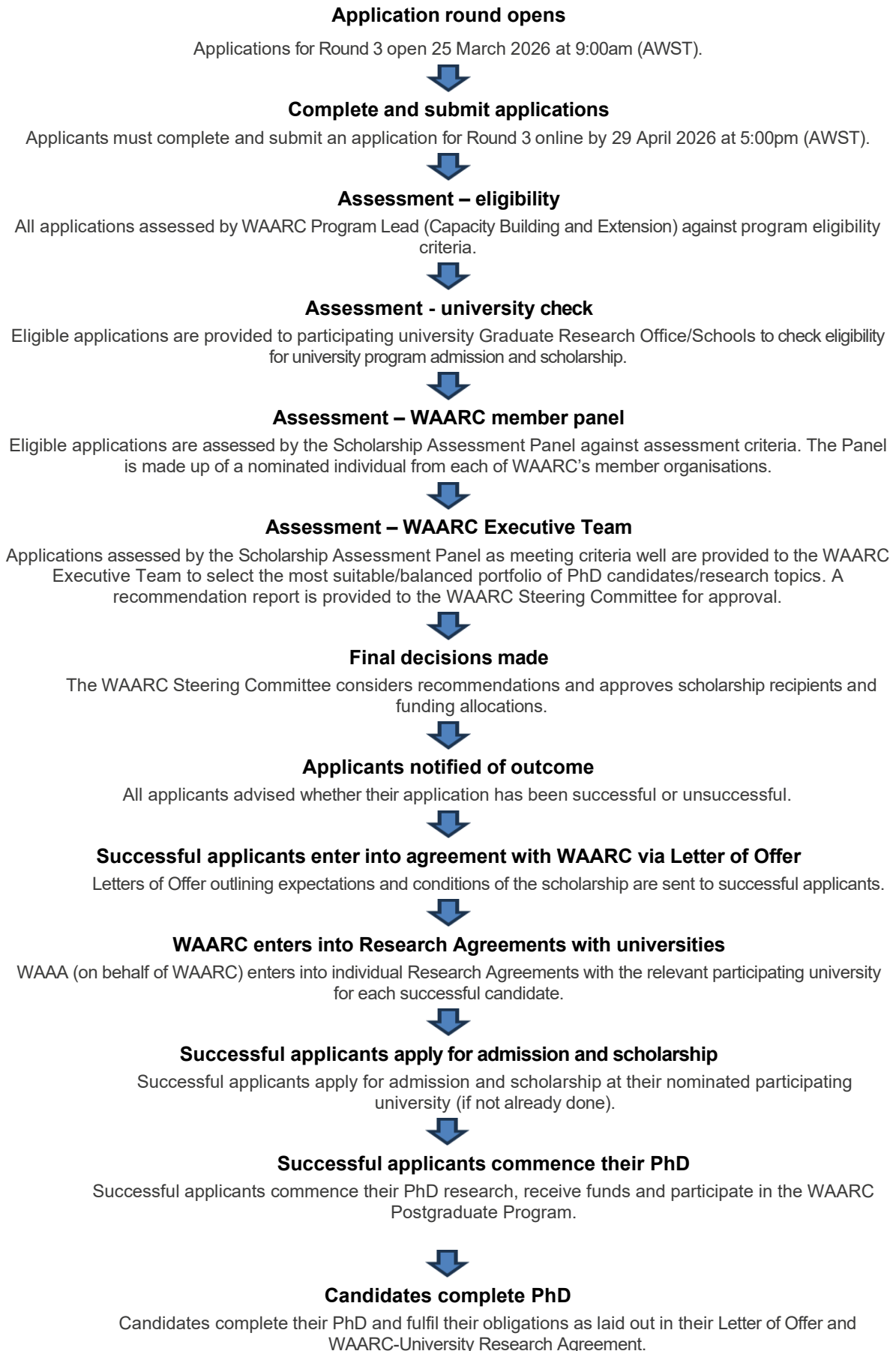
#### **Research topic support**

If you have a general research area in mind but have not yet identified a specific research topic, WAARC may be able to suggest potential ideas. To discuss topic support, please contact [Program Lead Jenny Crisp](#) with your broad area of research interest at least two weeks' prior to submitting your application.

#### **University and industry network support**

If you have a proposed PhD research project that aligns with WAARC programs but you are not yet part of a university research network, or you require support finding an industry co-supervisor, please contact [Program Lead Jenny Crisp](#) at least two weeks' prior to submitting your application.

## 4. Program process



## 5. Eligibility criteria

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### Participating universities

Applicants must nominate to enrol in one of the three WAARC-member universities:

- Curtin University,
- Murdoch University, or
- The University of Western Australia.

All three universities are based in Western Australia.

### Residency status

Domestic students are strongly preferred (Australian citizen or holding permanent residency status in Australia); international students may apply and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### Course entry requirements

Applicants must possess the required credentials pertinent to their chosen field of study and meet admission and base scholarship requirements for their chosen program at their enrolling university, including English language competency.

Note:

- Applicants should review their nominated university's PhD Program entry requirements and are encouraged to discuss their eligibility with the university Graduate Research Office/Schools, prior to applying.
- WAARC will seek endorsement of applicants by Graduate Research Office/Schools before progressing applications to the assessment phase.
- A suitable primary/coordinating supervisor must be available and employed at the nominated university to supervise the chosen research project.
- All supervisors (primary, coordinating and co-supervisors) must have capacity to supervise students and be qualified in the area of research.
- Applicants must liaise with their proposed primary supervisor prior to applying for a WAARC scholarship. WAARC may contact the nominated primary supervisor (and potentially other supervisors) as part of the assessment process.
- You do not have to have your supervisors confirmed to apply, but confirmation will be required during the Research Agreement phase.

### Enrolment requirements

Applicants who have commenced or intend to commence their study between 1 January and 31 December 2026 are eligible to apply.

Applicants must intend to complete their PhD as a full-time student to participate in the WAARC Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program.

While not preferred, program participants experiencing extenuating circumstances may change their enrolment to part-time during their PhD. This must be done in accordance with the university guidelines and with written approval from WAARC.

Successful recipients must include an industry co-supervisor on their supervisory panel. An industry co-supervisor might be from DPIRD, CSIRO, Grower Group Alliance, a commercial company or other.

If you have a proposed PhD research project that aligns with WAARC programs but you are not yet part of a university research network, or you require support finding an industry co-supervisor, please contact Program Lead Jenny Crisp at least two weeks' prior to submitting your application: [jenny.crisp@uwa.edu.au](mailto:jenny.crisp@uwa.edu.au).

## Priorities for research topic areas

To receive a scholarship, applicants must demonstrate their research project aligns with one or more of the following five areas of capacity need for the WA agricultural sector:

### 1. Data & Digital

There is a growing reliance on analytics, modelling, automation, and decision-support tools. While data volumes and digital technologies are expanding rapidly, workforce capability to integrate, analyse, and translate these data into practical outcomes is lagging. Strengthening data governance, analytics, applied AI, and digital literacy across disciplines is essential to enable evidence-based decision-making, improve research efficiency, and support innovation at farm and system levels.

### 2. Extension & Communication

Strong technical research alone is insufficient without skilled professionals who can engage growers, facilitate co-design, and support behavioural change. Declining extension capacity threatens the impact of RD&E investments, making renewed focus on communication skills, participatory methods, and extension workforce development fundamental to achieving productivity, resilience, and return on research investment.

### 3. Climate & Sustainability

Climate and sustainability capability reflects the growing urgency of climate adaptation, emissions management, and environmental stewardship in WA agriculture. Climate variability, carbon markets, and sustainability reporting are no longer peripheral issues but central to long-term viability and competitiveness. Strengthening skills in climate modelling, adaptation strategies, and sustainability metrics is critical to support resilient production systems and ensure the sector can respond proactively to environmental and market pressures.

### 4. Agronomy & Production Systems

Agronomy and production systems remain the applied foundation of WA's agricultural RD&E system, ensuring research is grounded in practical, regionally relevant farming contexts. There is concern about declining field-based expertise and succession in applied agronomy and farming systems research. Maintaining and renewing this capacity is vital to translate innovation into on-farm outcomes, integrate new technologies with existing practices, and sustain productivity while meeting emerging sustainability and climate challenges.

## **5. Systems / Interdisciplinary Capacity**

Systems and interdisciplinary capacity are increasingly significant as agricultural challenges become more complex and interconnected, spanning production, climate, economics, and social dimensions. There is a shortage of people able to integrate across disciplines and institutions, limiting the system's ability to address whole-of-farm and landscape-scale problems. Building this capacity is essential to move beyond siloed research approaches, enabling more effective collaboration, innovation, and system-wide solutions that reflect the realities faced by producers.

## 6. Assessment

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### Assessment criteria

#### Scientific Merit:

##### 1. Originality:

- The research should propose an approach or hypothesis that represents an innovative or novel contribution to the field of study.

##### 2. Significance:

- The necessity of the research must be evident, addressing critical questions or gaps within the field of study.

##### 3. Demand for Research:

- The selected research topic should represent a current or emerging industry need, within the broader context.

#### Research Capability & Capacity:

##### 1. Career Development:

- The applicant should indicate how they will utilise this opportunity to further their career in agricultural research.

##### 2. Professional Experience:

- The applicant should detail any relevant professional or industry experience that enhances the applicant's research capability and capacity.

#### Adoption and Impact:

##### 1. Contributory Impact:

- The expected project contributions should aim to advance the objectives of one or more of the WAARC programs.

##### 2. Pathway to Extension and Adoption:

The applicant must show how the research findings will be potentially extended to the WA agricultural community or other relevant target for adoption.

### Assessment process

An objective assessment process will identify eligible applicants to whom funding can be awarded. WAARC will seek to develop a balanced portfolio of PhD projects across industries, regions, and program areas and will consider equity and inclusion.

The assessment will be carried out in the following manner:

1. All applications will be assessed by WAARC Capacity Building and Extension Program Lead against program eligibility criteria. Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not progress.

2. WAARC-eligible applications will be short-listed by the WAARC Capacity Building and Extension Program Lead and Director against assessment criteria.
3. Concurrently to assessment step 2 above, WAARC-eligible applications will be provided to participating university Graduate Research Office/Schools to check eligibility for university program admission and scholarship requirements.
4. Short-listed and university-eligible applications will be assessed and ranked by the Scholarship Assessment Panel against assessment criteria. The Panel is made up of a nominated individual from each of WAARC's member organisations.
5. The WAARC Executive Team selects the most suitable/balanced portfolio of PhD candidates/research topics, in the context of Assessment Panel comments and rankings. A recommendation report is provided to the WAARC Steering Committee for approval.
6. The WAARC Steering Committee considers recommendations and approves scholarship recipients and funding allocations.

## Notification of application outcomes

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application (successful or unsuccessful) via email as soon as practicable. Successful applicants will receive a follow-up email with a Letter of Offer detailing the expectations and conditions of the top-up scholarship.

**Note:** A successful WAARC top-up scholarship application does not guarantee that applicants will be accepted into their chosen university's PhD program. Applicants must separately apply for course admission and a base scholarship through their nominated university's application process to secure a place in their PhD program.

## Decision-making

The WAARC Steering Committee will make all final decisions under this program, based on recommendations by the WAARC Executive Team. There is no appeal process, however, applicants can request feedback, and if timeframes permit, resubmit their application in a future funding round.

## 7. Additional information

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### Program partners

WAARC's university members, Curtin University, Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia, are responsible for overseeing the entry, progress and examination of the PhD and conferral of the degree of PhD to successful applicants, as well as providing primary and/or coordinating supervision. Applicants will need to be enrolled and maintain candidature progress in a PhD program at one of these three universities to participate in the program.

WAARC's three non-university members, CSIRO, DPIRD and GGA, will provide program participants with access to leading industry researchers as possible co-supervisors, as well as access to field sites and world-class research facilities.

DPIRD (through the Western Australian Agriculture Authority) is the administrator for the program, responsible for administration of the program's payments and underlying agreements and contracts. The application process will be managed through SmartyGrants with DPIRD's grant support team.

### Scholarship administration

WAAA, or the Western Australian Agriculture Authority (on behalf of WAARC as administrator of WAARC funds) will enter into individual Research Agreements with the relevant participating university for each successful candidate. Payments will be made to the scholarship participant's host university as per the Research Agreement, and the host university will be responsible for regular stipend payments and for administration of any operating funds.

Reporting requirements and any Intellectual Property considerations will be outlined in the university Research Agreement and WAARC Letter of Offer for each recipient.

### Scholarship Letter of Offer

Successful applicants are required to enter an agreement with WAARC via a Letter of Offer, which outlines the expectations, terms and conditions associated with the top-up scholarship.

These conditions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. You must be enrolled, and remain enrolled, full-time at your nominated university working towards academic achievement of a Doctor of Philosophy for your nominated research project, unless otherwise approved in writing by the WAARC Director.
2. You must use the scholarship for its intended purpose of supporting your living expenses while completing your PhD.
3. Provide copies of key research project documents to WAARC.
4. Permit WAARC to contact and speak with your supervisor/s about your progress.
5. Allow WAARC to access and view your university payment information.
6. With respect to media and communications, you must:
  - attend and present at each of the annual WAARC Postgraduate Showcase events conducted during the period you are enrolled in your PhD;

- attend and participate in at least one WAARC-organised field trip per year, if made available;
- participate in promotional opportunities as requested by WAARC and allow your image to be used by WAARC in media, online promotions, or in any communication materials;
- notify WAARC administration of any planned media/promotional/extension activity relating to the research project and acknowledge WAARC in such material;
- tag @WA Agricultural Research Collaboration in LinkedIn and Facebook posts and @WAAgCollab in X (formerly Twitter) posts related to the WAARC Postgraduate Program.

The Scholarship Letters of Offer to successful applicants will detail when the program participant is expected to commence their study (if they have not already commenced).

Applicants who defer commencement from the proposed start date in their Letter of Offer must seek approval from WAARC.

### 3. Glossary of terms

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**Applicant** – the individual who makes the application for funding.

**Application** – a submission made to the WA Agricultural Research Collaboration for a scholarship under the program, via the online platform SmartyGrants.

**AWST** – Australian Western Standard Time.

**Coordinating Supervisor** – a university employee who takes primary responsibility for the academic management of the student's PhD candidature and ensures all administrative and reporting requirements of the supervision are met.

**Co-Supervisor** – a person who has specific expertise useful to the student's research program and will be available as an independent person from whom the student may seek advice during the course of the candidature. They will also serve as backup for the Primary and/or Coordinating Supervisor. This person need not be an employee of a university but may be expected otherwise to hold adjunct, emeritus, or honorary status.

**CSIRO** – Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

**DPIRD** – Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

**GGA** – Grower Group Alliance.

**Letter of Offer** – a participant's agreement with WAARC that outlines the conditions and terms of their WAARC top-up scholarship.

**Primary Supervisor** – a university employee who provides primary academic leadership in the supervision of a PhD candidate.

**Program** – WA Agricultural Research Collaboration - Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program.

**Program Guidelines** – this document, which aims to provide clear and concise details of program management processes, administration, and governance.

**Program Lead (Capacity Building and Extension)** – the person responsible for managing this grant program.

**Program Participant** – a successful applicant who has been accepted into the WAARC Postgraduate Research Scholarship Program, signed a Letter of Offer and their host university has entered into a Research Agreement with the WAAA.

**RTP** - Research Training Program – a Commonwealth program which provides block grants to higher education providers to support both domestic and overseas students undertaking research doctorate and research masters degrees.

**Research Agreement** – an agreement between the Western Australian Agriculture Authority (WAAA, on behalf of WAARC as administrator of WAARC funds) and relevant participating university for each successful applicant.

**SmartyGrants** – the online grant management software platform used by this program.

**Successful Applicant** – an applicant who has been assessed and has progressed to the Letter of Offer phase. Once they have signed their Letter of Offer and their host university has signed a Research Agreement with the Western Australian Agriculture Authority (WAAA), they become a Program Participant.

**UWA** – The University of Western Australia.

**WAARC** – WA Agricultural Research Collaboration.

**WAARC Executive Team** – a management team comprised of WAARC Director Kelly Pearce, the WAARC Chief Operating Officer, and the appointed Program Leads.

**WAARC Program Leads** – the persons appointed to lead each of WAARC’s six Programs.

### Approval

Version	Author/Approver	Date
0.1	Jenny Crisp	09/02/2026
1.0	Jenny Crisp	tbc
1.0	Debra Mullan	tbc



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