Research Grants Services

NIDG Detailed Assessor Handbook

A guide for **Detailed Assessors** on the selection and assessment process under the *National Intelligence Discovery Grants* (NIDG) grant opportunities for

NIDG Intelligence Challenges – ID25 (Round 5)

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Contents

1. Overview

The Australian Research Council (ARC) provides grants administration services to other Australian Government entities who are managing grant programs focused on the university and research sector. The ARC provides research grants administration through the ARC's Research Grants Services (RGS) team. This process is managed through individual portals of the ARC's Research Management System (RMS).

This Handbook provides instructions and advice for **Detailed Assessors** on the assessment process for the National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG) Program – Intelligence Challenges, administered by the ARC through RGS on behalf of the Office of National Intelligence (ONI).

The specific objectives and assessment criteria for grant opportunities under the NIDG program are listed in Appendix 1, and are also available in the relevant Grant Guidelines on GrantConnect.

This Detailed Assessor Handbook covers assessment processes and procedures for:

- National Intelligence Discovery Grants (Round 5) – Intelligence Challenges (ID25).

This handbook *does not* cover the assessment process for grant opportunities offered under the ARC's National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP).

2. The Assessment Process

The objective of the assessment process conducted by RGS on behalf of ONI is to ensure effective peer review so that a shortlist of the highest quality applications is provided to ONI for funding approval.

After the peer review and shortlisting process is complete, ONI will review the shortlisted applications with respect to:

- fit with the *Intelligence Challenges*
- the *National Intelligence Community* (NIC) priority research needs
- Australia's national interest, including national security
- projects already funded and the funding envelope available.

ONI then makes recommendations to the relevant Delegate who decides which projects will be allocated funding.

Peer review, managed by RGS on behalf of ONI, plays a critical role in the assessment of NIDG grant applications and is undertaken by two groups of experts known as General and Detailed Assessors. Experts from each group assess applications against the grant opportunity assessment criteria and contribute to the process of scoring and ranking applications. Detailed Assessors' comments should be useful for both General Assessors and applicants. Detailed Assessors' comments and scores are considered by General Assessors as part of their assessment of applications, while Detailed Assessors' comments are incorporated into applicants' rejoinders.

General and Detailed Assessors have different roles in the peer review process. General Assessors are members of the Selection Advisory Committee (SAC). They utilise knowledge of their disciplinary areas, broad understanding of intellectual and methodological issues and expertise in good research planning to assess applications. They also draw on the comments and scores of Detailed Assessors to inform and moderate their assessments. Key aspects of the role of Detailed Assessors are outlined in Section 2.1.

The peer review process for NIDG will also provide advice on whether the applications suitably address an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the Intelligence Challenges.

The ONI Research Management System (RMS-ONI) is the web-based computer system available for the preparation and submission of applications, assessments and rejoinders for NIDG grants administered by RGS. The *RMS User Guide for Assessors*, assists **General** and **Detailed Assessors** to navigate the RMS assignment and assessment process. This User Guide is available on the ARC Assessor Resources site and provides assessors with additional RMS system-related information about the peer review process.

This document, *RGS NIDG Detailed Assessor Handbook*, is a general guide for **Detailed Assessors** to navigate the RMS-ONI assignment and assessment process, and is also available on the RGS website.

The NIDG grant opportunity has its own specific RMS portal (instance):

- ID25 – https://rmsoni.researchgrants.gov.au

The RMS-ONI portal can be accessed using your existing RMS (standard ARC) login details.

Applications for the NIDG grant opportunity have been submitted through the RMS-ONI portal. Assessments for the NIDG grant opportunity are also to be prepared and submitted through the RMS-ONI portal. Assessors should check within the ONI specific RMS portal (RMS-ONI) to confirm whether they have been assigned applications to assess for the NIDG grant opportunity.

2.1 Detailed Assessors

RMS profile

A Detailed Assessor's RMS profile plays an essential role in the assignment process as information contained in the profile assists with the matching of NIDG applications with appropriately skilled Detailed Assessors. It is important that Detailed Assessors ensure that their RMS profile is up-to-date and contains the following details:

1. **Expertise text:** Please outline your expertise briefly. The following format is suggested **"***My major area of research expertise is in a, b, c. I have additional research experience in q, r, s. I would also be able to assess in the areas of x, y, z. The research facilities, techniques and methodologies I use are l, m, n*"**.
2. **Field of Research (FoR-2020) Codes:** Please include between 6 and 10 FoR codes at the 6-digit level that reflect your key areas of expertise.
3. **Employment History:** Please ensure that your employment history is kept up to date, to enable your organisational conflicts of interests to be identified in RMS.
4. **Personal Details:** Please ensure your personal details are up to date, including conflicts of interest and personal material interest declarations.

This information will be used to match assessors with applications and should accurately represent your research expertise.

Assignment of applications

NIDG applications are assigned to Detailed Assessors using information from their RMS profile and expert judgement by the RGS Executive Director. Detailed Assessors for the NIDG grant opportunity have been approached by RGS to participate in the assessment process. Detailed Assessors form a targeted group of assessors from which the RGS Executive Director will assign applications for assessment.

Detailed assessments

Detailed Assessors provide scores and written comments addressing the assessment criteria on each application, and written comments on how well the proposed research project addresses an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the Intelligence Challenge(s) identified and justified in the application. Detailed Assessors may be assigned a number of applications within their field of research or across a broader disciplinary area on the basis of their RMS profile expertise text and FoR codes. Detailed Assessors are asked to:

1. Complete in-depth assessments of applications in ONI-RMS, providing scores and detailed comments against NIDG grant opportunity assessment criteria (refer to Appendix 1) and comments against identified Challenges (refer to Appendix 2)

2. Identify the merits or otherwise of the application with respect to the assessment criteria set out in the *NIDG Grant Guidelines*

3. Assess and score the application for each assessment criterion separately.

4. Assess and provide detailed comments on how well the proposed research project addresses an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the identified Challenge(s).

5. Provide detailed comments on how the proposed research project fits with the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) (refer to Section 2.3) selected within the application.

Minimum and maximum character limits apply to comment fields in the assessment form on ONI-RMS.

If a Detailed Assessor identifies a conflict of interest (COI) with an assigned application this must be declared to RGS by rejecting the assignment in ONI-RMS and no further participation in the assessment process for that application should take place. If a Detailed Assessor is unsure of whether a COI exists, they must seek advice from RGS before proceeding with accepting an assignment by emailing ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au as soon as possible. Further information and policies about a COI are in Section 3.1.

Detailed Assessors may receive applications to assess at any stage of the assessment process due to late COIs being declared by other assessors.

As applications may address more than one Challenge (maximum three (3)) within the set of *Intelligence Challenges*, Detailed Assessors must ensure their comments accurately address the Challenge(s) in the numerical order (1 - 9 for Intelligence Challenges) listed in Appendix 2).

Detailed Assessor comments and scores, including those regarding the Challenge(s) and the Technology Readiness Level selected, are made available to General Assessors for consideration as part of application assessment, while Detailed Assessor comments are made available to applicants anonymously once an application/scheme is open for Rejoinders.

How to ensure high quality detailed assessments

Detailed Assessors can refer to the ARC Peer Review webpage for **examples** of well-written detailed assessments. The webpage also provides links to two supplementary guides, the *Peer Review* and *Disclosure of Interests and Management of Conflicts of Interest*, which support implementation of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code).

High quality detailed assessments are crucial for the integrity of the peer review process. As General Assessors may not be an expert in the specific field of an application but are likely to have expertise in the general field of the proposed research, Detailed Assessors' scores that are justified with constructive comments help General Assessors assess the merit of an application. Similarly, Detailed Assessors' comments enable applicants to address potential criticisms in their rejoinders.

Detailed Assessors are asked to provide detailed high quality, constructive assessments with the following elements:

1. **Objective** and professional comments

2. **Detailed** comments on the merits or otherwise of the application with respect to the weighted assessment criteria

3. **Detailed** comments on how effectively the proposed research project will address an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the Challenge(s) identified in the application

4. **Sufficient** information to allow applicants to provide a rejoinder addressing assessor comments about the application, and to allow non-disciplinary expert General Assessors to evaluate the merit of the application (one or two sentences is not sufficient, a clear explanation of why it is excellent or why the assessor considers there is an issue with the project is required)

5. **Comments that align closely with scores**—for example, an 'A' score should not be submitted if an application is assessed as being of limited merit against a criterion. Further, if a 'D' score is given, then suitable constructive criticisms and comments justifying the score are required. It is important to remember that applicants see only the comments at the rejoinder stage and the SAC will see both comments and scores. It is essential that your scores and comments are fit for purpose and provide appropriate information for the person using them.

6. **Comments that are fair, meaningful and balanced**, addressing only issues relevant to the application in terms of the assessment criteria. Comments should provide a sound, comprehensive account of, and justification for views about the application, while respecting the care with which applications have been prepared

7. **Comments that are free** from platitudes, exaggeration and understatement

8. **Timely submission** via ONI-RMS as early as possible is appreciated, and by the RGS deadline is required.

Refer to the [ARC Peer Review webpage](#) for **examples** of good quality Detailed assessments. The webpage also provides links to two supplementary guides, the *Statement of Support for Assessors within the National Competitive Grants Program* and *ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy*, supporting implementation of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code).

How to avoid inappropriate assessments

Detailed Assessors **should not** put the following in their assessment comments, as this may render the assessment inappropriate:

1. Scores which do not align with assessment text

2. Excessive use of acronyms

3. Generic comments used in multiple assessments

4. Very brief assessment text

5. Scores that are included within the assessment text

6. Information that identifies researchers named on other applications

7. Advice about their own identity, standing in, or understanding of, the research field in the application

8. The outcome or status of relevant research by the Chief Investigators and/or Partner Investigators which is not mentioned by the applicants in the application, or comments about the potential ineligibility of an application. All queries regarding outcomes of relevant research not mentioned in the application and eligibility should be sent to ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au as soon as a potential issue is identified.

9. Restatement or rephrasing of any part of the application

10. Comments about the potential ineligibility of an application. All queries regarding eligibility should be sent to ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au

11. Comments comparing one application with another in the NIDG program

12. Text that has been copied from a previous assessment

13. Text that appears to be discriminatory, defamatory or distastefully irrelevant (such as gratuitous criticism of a researcher and/or eligible organisation)

14. Text or comments produced by the use of generative Artificial Intelligence technology

Under no circumstances should Detailed Assessors contact researchers and/or institutions about a submitted application or seek additional information from any sources.

When assessing applications Detailed Assessors must rely solely on the information provided within the application including referenced publications and preprints and should not seek additional information from any sources. This includes following any hyperlinks that may have been included in the application. The inclusion of webpage addresses/URLs and hyperlinks is only permitted under certain circumstances such as publications (including preprints) that are only available online. Webpage addresses/URLs and hyperlinks should not be used to circumvent page limits, nor should they provide information that is not contained in the application. All information relevant to the application must be contained within the application.

Assessors should contact the RGS team at ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au if they have any questions or concerns

about potential eligibility issues, particularly issues related to personnel or organisations named on an application. As noted above, assessors should not seek additional information from any other sources.

Treatment of inappropriate assessments

Inappropriate assessments compromise the integrity of the peer review process. To be fair to all applicants, RGS may review and reject assessments with inappropriate or highly subjective comments from Detailed Assessors about any aspect of the application. If General Assessors are concerned about the appropriateness of any assessment text or comments that do not match scores from Detailed Assessors, or identify a potential COI, they will contact RGS. RGS will then investigate the concerns and decide whether an assessment should be amended by the Detailed Assessor or removed from the process. The latter happens only in rare circumstances and requires the approval of the NIDG RGS Senior Responsible Officer (SRO).

If inappropriate assessments are identified early in the assessment process by the ARC or the applicant during the rejoinder stage, RGS may ask the Detailed Assessor to amend their assessment to the application or consider removal of an assessment.

The RGS website also contains information for applicants advising how to request that RGS review an assessment that contains inappropriate elements during the Rejoinder period.

2.2 Intelligence Challenges

The alignment of Expressions of Interest (EOI) applications with the *Intelligence Challenges* were assessed by the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) through the EOI process.

The *Full Application* is intended to be in line with that EOI project proposal, however the full applications provide much more detail about the proposed research, and for this reason we ask you to assess the alignment with the Challenges, and provide information where it appears alignment is not strong.

Applications submitted for the **NIDG Round 5** grant opportunity must address one or more Challenge(s) (*maximum three*). For **Round 5** (**ID25**), nine (9) Intelligence Challenges have been set by ONI (representing priority areas of the National Intelligence Community [NIC]). Appendix 2 provides detailed information on the Intelligence Challenges.

The Intelligence Challenges for **ID25** are:

- Covert collection challenges
- Space-based challenges
- Identity management challenges
- Emerging biological science challenges
- Emerging material science challenges
- Cyber security, protective security and offensive cyber challenges
- Human behaviour and influence challenges
- Data-driven and real-time analytical challenges
- Situation awareness and multi-source assessment challenges

Integrated Information Sharing **Note that the Challenges listed in the assessment form for Detailed Assessors may appear in a different order to the order shown in the application.**

For ease of reference, RGS recommends that assessors accurately address the Challenge(s) in the numerical order (1-9 for Intelligence Challenges) listed in Appendix 2.

Detailed Assessors must provide comments against each identified Challenge assessing how well the proposed research project addresses an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the Challenge(s). This can include consideration of:

- how the research is significant in or critical to the Challenge

- why the research is highly innovative, game-changing and can offer new avenues for technology or policy

- whether the research will make future national intelligence or security capability significantly better.

A comment is required for each identified Challenge, but no scores are needed. Detailed Assessors should take their comments on the Challenges into consideration as they enter scores against the assessment criteria. Detailed Assessor comments against the Challenge(s) and the applicants' Rejoinders will assist ONI in their selection processes.

General Assessors do not score the identified Challenge(s) but must consider the Detailed Assessors' comments on the Challenge(s) and the applicant's Rejoinder as part of their application assessment scoring process. General Assessors must take working notes on the Challenge(s) and comments to facilitate discussion at the SAC meeting. As with Detailed Assessors, General Assessors can consider:

- how the research is significant in or critical to the Challenge

- why the research is highly innovative, game-changing and can offer new avenues for technology or policy

- whether the research will make future national intelligence or security capability significantly better.

2.3 Technology Readiness Level (TRL) Selection

Applications submitted for the NIDG grant opportunity must identify a **Technology Readiness Level** (TRL) that relates to the application, as outlined in the *Technology Readiness Levels Definitions and Descriptions* document published by the Department of Defence - TRL Explanations_1.pdf.

For Detailed Assessors, a comment is required for the TRL Selection, but no scores are needed. The comment entered by a Detailed Assessor should address the appropriateness of the TRL selected by the applicant relative to the application. If the TRL selected is not congruent with the application, a new TRL should be entered in the comment field along with a justification of the updated TRL selection.

General Assessors do not score the identified TRL selection but must consider the Detailed Assessors' comments on the TRL and the applicant's Rejoinder as part of their application assessment. General Assessors may take working notes on the TRL selection to facilitate discussion at the SAC meeting if required.

2.4 Scoring, ranking and submitting assessments

Scoring

When applying the Scoring Matrix, General Assessors should have regard for the specific grant opportunity objectives (see **Appendix 1**).

Scoring applications against assessment criteria can be a difficult exercise when Assessors might only look at a small sub-set of applications. Bands within the Scoring Matrix ideally represent a distribution across all applications submitted to a grant opportunity.

While the applications you are assessing have been shortlisted through a competitive process, only the very best applications should be recommended for funding. As a guide, approximately 10% should fall into the top scoring band ('A'). These would have been assessed as near flawless applications across all assessment criteria.

A Scoring Matrix for the scores **A** to **E** is provided in **Table 1** below and should guide scoring by both General and Detailed Assessors for the NIDG Full Application stage.

Table 1: Scoring Matrix

Score	Criteria
A	**Outstanding:** Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research in the field.
B	**Excellent:** Of high quality and strongly competitive.
C	**Very Good:** Interesting, sound and compelling.
D	**Good:** Sound but lacks a compelling element.
E	**Uncompetitive:** Uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses.

Ranking

Each application must have a unique rank. Although ONI-RMS will use the **overall application scores** to automatically rank an Assessor's assessments as these are completed in RMS, if multiple applications have the same **overall application scores** these applications will be flagged and an Assessor must assign a unique rank to differentiate equally scored applications. Differentiation should be based on how you compare the applications in relation to the Scoring Matrix.

Note: ONI-RMS will use your scores to automatically rank applications, and then use your rank order to differentiate equally scored applications.

Assessments should be submitted when *all applications* have been assigned:

  1) a score, and
  2) a unique ranking.

2.5 Important factors to consider when assessing

Objectives, assessment criteria and Challenges

The NIDG grant opportunity has specific objectives, assessment criteria and Challenges which must be addressed that aim to ensure funded applications achieve the best possible outcomes. Assessors must have regard to both the objectives and the assessment criteria as outlined in the NIDG *Grant Guidelines* and **Appendix 1** of this document, and the Challenges relevant to each NIDG grant opportunity as outlined in **Appendix 2**.

Each grant opportunity has specific objectives and assessment criteria. Assessors must have regard to both the objectives and the assessment criteria as outlined in the relevant Grant Guidelines and the Appendix of this document.

Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE)

The ROPE assessment criterion requires all Assessors to identify and consider research excellence relative to a researcher's career, life experiences and opportunities for research. It aims to ensure that assessment processes accurately evaluate a researcher's career history relative to their current career stage and consider whether their productivity and contribution is commensurate with the opportunities that have been available to them.

All General and Detailed Assessors should be familiar with the full ROPE statement located on the ARC website.

Interdisciplinary research

Interdisciplinary research is highly valued in the NIDG program. The ARC has provided the *ARC Statement of Support for Interdisciplinary Research* which outlines support for interdisciplinary research.

Interdisciplinary research can be a distinct mode of research, or a combination of researchers, knowledge and/or approaches from disparate disciplines. Examples of interdisciplinary research may include: researchers from different disciplines working together in a team; researchers collaborating to bring different perspectives to solve a problem; researchers utilising methods normally associated with one or more disciplines to solve problems in another discipline; and one or more researchers translating innovative blue sky or applied research outcomes from one discipline into an entirely different research discipline.

Assessors are required to assess all research on a fair and equal basis, including applications and outputs involving interdisciplinary and collaborative research. To assist with this, RGS facilitates consideration of applications by relevant General Assessors with interdisciplinary expertise or where not feasible, applications are allocated to General Assessors who have broad disciplinary expertise regardless of discipline grouping. Interdisciplinary applications are allocated to Detailed Assessors with specific interdisciplinary expertise or from different disciplines covered in the application.

Preprints or comparable resources

General Assessors should consider the merit of publications including preprints and comparable resources that are listed in the application. Assessors may access hyperlinks and evaluate if a citation included in the application is a crucial part of the research discourse, and evaluate the suitability, quality and relevance of the research output to help them determine the quality and novelty of the proposed research. However, Assessors should not use online search engines to identify or evaluate applicants' publications that are not included within the application.

Preprints or comparable resources can be included in any part of an application. This includes within the Research Outputs list and the body of an application. An application will not be deemed to be ineligible for the citing and listing of preprints or comparable resources.

A preprint or comparable resource is a scholarly output that is uploaded by the authors to a recognised publicly accessible archive, repository, or preprint service (such as, but not limited to, arXiv, bioRxiv, medRxiv, ChemRxiv, Peer J Preprints, Zenodo, GitHub, PsyArXiv and publicly available university or government repositories etc.). This will include a range of materials that have been subjected to varying degrees of peer review from none to light and full review. Ideally, a preprint or comparable resource should have a unique identifier or a DOI (digital object identifier). Any citation of a preprint or comparable resource should be explicitly identified as such and listed in the references with a DOI, URL or equivalent, version number and/or date of access, as applicable.

Inclusion of preprints or comparable resources within the body of the application should comply with standard disciplinary practices for the relevant field.

How to submit detailed assessments

If a Detailed Assessor has been assigned multiple applications, ONI-RMS will use the **overall application scores** to automatically rank a Detailed Assessor's assessments as these are completed in ONI-RMS. Where multiple applications have the same **overall application scores** these applications will be flagged and a Detailed Assessor must assign a unique rank to differentiate equally scored applications.
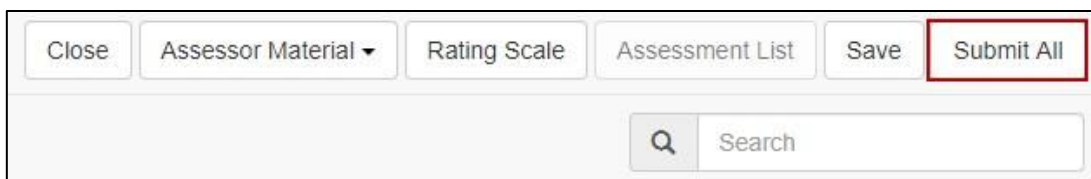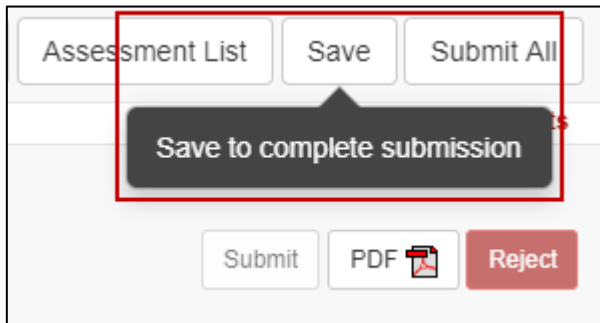
Once the unique rank is assigned the error message will disappear and the assessments can be submitted.

If assessments have not been submitted individually the 'Submit All' button will activate at the top right of the screen once all unsubmitted assessments have reached the minimum system requirements.

To submit all completed assessments, select 'Submit All' and then 'Save' to complete submission.

Note: Once assessments have been submitted a Detailed Assessor will not be able to amend the details, and the 'Submit' button will be greyed out. If you need to change an assessment please email ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au before the assessment closing date to have the assessment 'de-submitted'. For further details regarding completing and submitting assessments in ONI-RMS refer to *RMS User Guide for Assessors* available on the ARC Assessor Resources page.

3. Ensuring integrity of process

3.1 Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest (COI)

The NIDG program utilises the ARC policy on COIs and confidentiality. The *ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy* is designed to ensure that all COIs are managed in a rigorous and transparent way. It aims to prevent individuals from influencing decisions unfairly and to maintain public confidence in the integrity, legitimacy, impartiality and fairness of the peer review process.

Any individual who is reviewing material for RGS, on behalf of its Funding Entities, must agree to comply with the confidentiality and COI statement, and must clearly disclose any material personal interests that may affect, or might be perceived to affect, their ability to perform their role.

All Assessors must maintain an up-to-date RMS profile, including personal details, current employment details and previous employment history within the past two (2) years. This information will assist RGS, on behalf of its Funding Entities, with the identification and management of organisational conflicts of interest.

Assessors reviewing grant applications who have identified a conflict of interest must reject the grant application assigned in ONI-RMS to assist RGS, on behalf of its Funding Entities, in the management of conflicts of interest.

Examples of material personal interests that are considered by RGS to be COIs include holding funding with a named participant within the past two (2) years or having been a collaborator or co-author with a named participant on a research output within the last four (4) years. For more information on disclosure of COIs, including material personal interest declarations, please refer to the *Identifying and Handling a Conflict of Interest in* *NCGP processes* document.

> **Note:** In ONI-RMS, Assessors will be asked to indicate their willingness to comply with this policy before proceeding to assess. They can do this by selecting the 'Accept' button.

> **Extract from the ARC Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the ARC's grants programs (July 2023):**
>
> The ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy (2020) requires that all officials and individuals carrying out ARC business, including assessors and peer reviewers, are required to preserve the principles of confidentiality outlined in the policy. **Release of material into generative AI tools constitutes a breach of confidentiality and peer reviewers, including all Detailed and General Assessors, must not use generative AI as part of their assessment activities**.
>
> Assessors are asked to provide detailed high quality, constructive assessments that assist the Selection Advisory Committees to assess the merits of an application. The use of generative AI may compromise the integrity of the ARC's peer review process by, for example, producing text that contains inappropriate content, such as generic comments and restatements of the application.

3.2 Research integrity and research misconduct

The NIDG program utilises the ARC policy on research integrity and research misconduct. If in the course of undertaking an assessment you identify or suspect a potential research integrity breach or research misconduct, please notify the ARC Research Integrity Office (researchintegrity@arc.gov.au) in accordance with Section 5 of the ARC Research Integrity Policy. Please do not mention your concerns in any assessment comments.

The ARC Research Integrity Office will consider whether to refer your concerns to the relevant institution for investigation in accordance with the requirements of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of* *Research (2018)*. You should provide sufficient information to allow the ARC to assess whether there is a basis for referring the matter to the institution and to enable the relevant institution to progress an investigation into the allegation (if required).

Foreign financial support, foreign affiliations and foreign honorary positions: participants applying for ARC grants are required to answer questions in their application relating to foreign financial support and foreign affiliations, including current and previous associations. Participants are required to declare:

- foreign financial support (cash or in-kind) for research related activities
- current or past associations or affiliations with a foreign sponsored talent program (for the last 10 years)
- current associations or affiliations with a foreign government, foreign political party, foreign state-owned enterprise, foreign military and/or foreign police organisations

If in the course of undertaking an assessment you identify or suspect a potential issue of foreign interference, please send an email highlighting your concerns to RGS via ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au as soon as possible.

> **Note:** In ONI-RMS, Assessors will be asked to indicate their willingness to comply with this policy before proceeding to assess. They can do this by selecting the 'Accept' button.

3.3 Applications outside the Assessor's area of expertise

The RGS, on behalf of its Funding Entities, receives NIDG applications from many scholarly fields. Occasionally you will be asked to assess an application that does not appear to correspond closely with your area of expertise, particularly if you are a General Assessor. Your views are valuable as

they are being sought on the entire application, drawing on your expert knowledge as a researcher. If you are a **General Assessor** and are concerned that an application is well outside your area of expertise, **please contact the RGS team via** ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au **before** rejecting the assignment.

If you are a **Detailed Assessor** and believe that the RGS has misunderstood your expertise, or has made an error in assigning an application to you, please give **early notice** of your view by rejecting the applicable application/s in ONI-RMS and entering a reason in the Reject Reason comment box. It is also important to review/update your RMS profile expertise text and FoR codes.

3.4 Eligibility

If, while assessing an application, you have concerns about eligibility, ethics or other issues associated with an application, **you must not include this information in your assessment**. Please send an email highlighting your concerns to the **RGS team** via ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au as soon as possible. RGS, on behalf of its Funding Entities, is responsible for investigating and making decisions on these matters, and Assessors should not conduct investigations at any point. Please complete your assessment based on the merits of the application **without** giving consideration to the potential eligibility issue.

ONI-RMS has functionality to populate research outputs into applications from within a researcher's RMS profile. Researchers will have the flexibility to choose and add which outputs to include in the application. RGS is aware of some research output display errors that are system issues and cannot be corrected by RMS users. Any applications that are affected will not be deemed to breach eligibility requirements and all Assessors should disregard research output display errors in their assessment of applications. Examples of possible research output display errors include symbols, foreign language characters and subscript/superscript that does not render correctly.

3.5 Unconscious bias

General and Detailed Assessors should also be aware of how their unconscious bias could affect the peer review process.

Unconscious biases are pervasive and may relate to perceptions about a range of attributes including:

1. gender and/or sexuality
2. social/cultural background
3. career path
4. institutional employer
5. discipline

RGS encourages Assessors to recognise their own biases and be aware of them in their assessments. A selection of short, online tests for identifying unconscious biases is available via Harvard University's 'Implicit Social Attitudes' demonstration sites.

4. Contact details for queries during the assessment process

For **all** assignment and assessment, as well as accessibility enquiries, please email the **RGS team** via ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au (General and Detailed Assessors).

For all questions relating to the SAC and SAC meetings, please contact ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au

***Appendix 1*: National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG) Program (Round 5) ID25**

Objectives, Intended Outcomes and Assessment Criteria

Please note: For assessment criteria Assessors assign a score in the assessment form and do not have to consider the weighting of a criterion as this is applied automatically within ONI-RMS.

The information below provides ready access to the NIDG program objectives and assessment criteria as set out in the *Grant Guidelines for the National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG) Program* (available on GrantConnect). Assessors should use their judgement and experience to assess the appropriate score within the context of the relevant discipline.

Grant Opportunity – NIDG Intelligence Challenges (ID25)

Overview

NIDG supports excellent research that deepens understanding of emerging science and technology and addresses intelligence and national security interests. This grant program will facilitate innovation and develop national security and intelligence capacity. It will also enable Australia's *National Intelligence Community* (NIC) to systematically engage with Australia's research and technology community.

NIDG provides support to research that aligns with the priority research areas identified by the Australian Government. These research areas are outlined in the *Intelligence Challenges*. More information on the *Intelligence Challenges* are available on the RGS website.

Objectives

The objectives of the **National Intelligence Discovery Grants** (NIDG) grant opportunity is to:

a) support excellent fundamental research (sometimes called discovery, basic or blue sky research) in areas identified in the *Intelligence Challenges*;

b) build Australia's research capacity and capability in these areas by supporting researchers, fostering research trainees, and contributing to a greater body of open source research;

c) enhance collaboration in the research, science and technology community that supports Australia's *National Intelligence Community*; and

d) support systematic and coordinated engagement between the research, science and technology community and Australia's *National Intelligence Community*.

Intended outcomes

The intended outcomes of the **National Intelligence Discovery Grants** (NIDG) grant opportunity are:

a) increased scale of Australian research into emerging science and technology impacting Australia's national security, sovereignty and potential future intelligence capability;

b) strengthened relationships and greater interaction between the research, science and technology community and Australia's *National Intelligence Community*; and

c) enhanced ability of Australia's *National Intelligence Community* to access and use relevant knowledge and research to inform policy development in intelligence and national security related science and technology.

Assessment Criteria and Scoring Matrix – National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG)

Assessment criterion	(A) Outstanding	(B) Excellent	(C) Very Good	(D) Good	(E) Uncompetitive
	Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research in the field.	Of high quality and strongly competitive.	Interesting, sound and compelling.	Sound, but lacks a compelling element.	Uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses.

Assessment criteria and weightings	Assessment criteria details
Project quality and benefit: 60%	Demonstrate this through identifying the: ▪ contribution to an important gap in knowledge or significant problem ▪ novelty/originality and innovation of the proposed research (including any new methods, technologies, theories or ideas that will be developed) ▪ clarity of the hypothesis, theories and research questions ▪ cohesiveness of the project design and implementation plan (including the appropriateness of the aim, conceptual framework, method, data and/or analyses) ▪ new or advanced knowledge resulting from outcomes of the research ▪ extent to which the project would build research capacity and ▪ potential to enhance Australian intelligence and national security capabilities.
Investigator(s) / Capability: 25%	Demonstrate this through identifying: ▪ Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE); ▪ time and capacity to undertake the research; ▪ evidence of experience in research training, mentoring; and supervision (where appropriate) and ▪ the capability of the investigator or team to build collaborations both within Australia and internationally.
Feasibility and commitment: 15%	Demonstrate this through identifying the: ▪ cost-effectiveness of the research and its value for money; ▪ suitability of the environment for the research team and their project, and for HDR students where appropriate, including availability and resourcing of Postgraduate Researchers (HDR students) and Postdoctoral Research Associates; ▪ availability of the necessary facilities to complete the project; and ▪ extent to which the project's design, participants and requested budget create confidence in the successful completion of the proposed research on time.

Appendix 2: NIDG Intelligence Challenges

Please note: All applications submitted to the NIDG program must address one or more *Intelligence Challenges* (maximum three) specific to the NIDG grant opportunity. ONI have listed nine (9) Intelligence Challenges for NIDG Round 5 (ID25). Detailed information about the *Intelligence Challenges* is included below.

Assessors must use their judgement and experience to consider how well the proposed research project addresses an important gap in knowledge or a significant problem as implied through the Challenge(s) identified in each application as part of their assessment. Detailed Assessors must provide comments on the Challenge(s) justification in the assessment form. The Challenges are not scored directly but they must be considered as assessors score against the assessment criteria.

National Intelligence Discovery Grants (NIDG) Program
ID25: Intelligence Challenges 2025

The *2017 Independent Intelligence Review* (IIR) identified a number of challenges facing Australia's intelligence enterprise over the coming decade. These included the increasing complexity of the geostrategic environment, broadening scope of national security and intelligence missions, rapid pace of scientific and technological change and high levels of innovation investment by other nations. To meet these challenges the Review recommended, among a number of other recommendations, a more systematic approach to leveraging science and technology.

To enable the National Intelligence Community (NIC) to better leverage emerging science and technology, the following nine challenges have been identified as being the priority areas for the *National Intelligence Discovery Grants* (NIDG) Program (ID25) for funding commencing in 2025.

Covert collection challenges

The ability to access and collect intelligence from people, imagery, signals, or emanations, signatures, nodes, networks (including internet-of-things environments) and transactions with a low probability of detection and/or attribution. The ability to degrade or defeat adversary collection and cyber capabilities to safely move people, information and equipment into, out of, and through environments with low signature and likelihood of detection and/or attribution.

Examples of research fields include:

- Sensors, signatures, signals, emanations and networks.
- Forensic methods to detect and analyse tampering or manipulation of satellite imagery and other remote sensing data.
- Computer network exploitation.
- Covert, secure and assured communications and internet traffic including attribution and decloaking or otherwise anonymised traffic (e.g. I2P).
- Financial intelligence including cryptocurrency, block-chain and distributed ledger technologies.
- Emerging encryption technology including homomorphic and quantum based.

Space-based challenges

The ability to leverage low cost and innovative technological advancement in space-based and high-altitude capabilities in a timely manner to improve collection, communication and analysis capabilities.

Examples of research fields include:

- Satellite communications, sensors and networks.
- Automation and on-board processing and analysis.
- Advanced materials.
- Space-based situation awareness.
- Counter space-denial capabilities.

Identity management challenges

The ability to quickly, accurately and uniquely identify individuals from all types of data (online, surveillance, biometric, speech, behavioural, forensic, text, etc.), including where the data has low linkages to real world identities. The ability to mask or obfuscate the identity of an individual from adversaries where access to online, surveillance, biometric, forensic or other data is available.

Examples of research fields include:

- Biometrics, biological or behavioural (e.g. gait analysis) for authentication, biometric authentication mechanisms and counter biometric considerations.

- Bio- and geo- forensics (including for law enforcement and prosecutions).
- Deep fakes/synthetic content analysis and detection
- Deep fake counter-measures and considerations (e.g. that defeat traditional security measures).
- Web-scraping and machine learning for identity data.
- Socio-technical systems and systems integration.
- Named entity recognition using probabilistic methods.
- Identity verification processes for financial intelligence.
- Awareness and management of consumer data collection.

Emerging biological science challenges

The ability to develop methodologies, techniques, services and devices from emerging biological technologies to provide new or alternate options to meet existing and future intelligence mission objectives. The ability to detect, identify, analyse, counter, defeat and prosecute threats from emerging biological technologies, in a safe and timely manner. The ability to exploit advances in machine learning to enable the above.

Examples of research fields include:
- Emerging biotechnology (e.g. in molecular biology, chemical sciences).
- Synthetic biology (e.g. genetic engineering, emerging threats, ethical, legal and societal aspects).
- Immunology and microbiology (e.g. emerging threats and applications).
- Pathogen threat detection and modelling.
- Human augmentation technologies (e.g. neuroscience advancements, human-machine interface and wearable devices).

Emerging material science challenges

The ability to develop methodologies, techniques, services and devices from emerging material technologies to provide new or alternate options to meet existing and future intelligence mission objectives. Identification, development and employment of new or novel materials with unique properties, including rare earths and complex alloys, to gain technical, performance and cost benefits. The ability to exploit advances in machine learning to enable the above.

Examples of research fields include:
- Nanotechnology and material science (e.g. miniaturisation and new functions).
- Emerging semi-conductor and related technologies.
- Convergence or integration of technologies (e.g. nano-, bio- and info- technologies).
- Human augmentation technologies, human-machine interface and wearable devices.
- Quantum sensing and supporting technologies.
- Quantum material science and engineering related computing.

Cyber security, protective security and offensive cyber challenges

The ability to ensure the security and integrity of sensitive and classified information whilst enabling flexible/remote working and crisis response. The ability to predict, prevent, detect, attribute, respond and recover from cyber incidents and malign online interference (foreign, domestic, insider) at a national scale. The ability to conduct offensive cyber and informational activities to disrupt emerging security threats.

Examples of research fields include:
- Cyber (and national infrastructure) systems analysis, vulnerability, risk, resilience.
- Human aspects of cyber security (e.g. insider threat, behavioural analysis, sentiment analysis).
- Mobile device trust/assurance for remote access and collaborative working.
- Networking and sensor technologies including internet-of-things (e.g. LoRaWAN or related technology).
- Supply chain security/intelligence.

- Blockchain intelligence. Insight into emerging digital currency management tools.
- Cryptography including crypt architecture and crypt engineering/implementation.
- Crypto-jacking prevention and forensic science.
- Side channel analysis.
- Novel models for achieving rapid high assurance certification, accreditation, and deployment of technologies for high secure networks and systems.
- Quantum technologies and supporting technologies.
- Cyber extortion (e.g. ransomware) response and countermeasures.
- Emerging technologies in creating deficiencies or augmenting existing practices.
- Dual design to incorporate both security/privacy and lawful access.
- Integration of AI with computer network exploitation and computer network defence.

Human behaviour and influence challenges

The ability to identify and understand actors' psychologies, social identities, narratives and behaviours that constitute a threat to Australia's security. The ability to mitigate and counter the cultural, psycho-social and organisational drivers and antecedents to national security threats. The ability to influence target audiences to elicit information, affect behaviour or shape preferences.

Examples of research fields include:

- Network analysis and disruption techniques (e.g. criminal, terrorist, etc.).
- Behavioural analysis (e.g. NLP and language agnostic) of individuals and groups, including in person, online and via multi-source digital data sets to profile and predict psychological phenomena (e.g., motivation, intent, loyalty, trust).
- Building trust and influence and eliciting information, including influencing outcomes in cross-cultural, hostile, resistant, conversational and time-sensitive contexts (in person and online).
- Identifying and countering malign interference, influence and disinformation.
- Identifying drivers, antecedents and pathways to radicalisation and extremism.
- Understanding actors, communities, cultures, identities and narratives and influencing effects / outcomes.
- Identifying trends in transnational, serious and organised criminal activities.
- Detecting and countering adverse 'crowd' or mass behaviour.
- Human vulnerabilities related to cyber-extortion, trafficking, bribery and corruption.
- Elicitation and credibility assessment.
- Resilience and functioning when alone/remote in oppressive or extreme environments.
- How deep or strategic fakes influence decision making and/or disrupt social norms.

Data-driven and real-time analytical challenges

The ability to employ advanced machine learning, natural language technologies and data science techniques to autonomously (or semi-autonomously) identify, extract, fuse and disseminate meaningful intelligence from large, disparate, sparse and/or incomplete data sets, including linguistic (text, speech, etc.), geospatial, financial, signals, identity and other relevant data sets. The ability to do this at the speed and scale required to meet emerging threats.

Examples of research fields include:

- Data management, data engineering and data curation.
- High performance computing.
- Automated information fusion, filtering, triage and knowledge management.
- Advanced sampling, pattern recognition, predictive analytics and statistics.
- Natural language processing, large language models and other language technologies.
- Financial intelligence analytics using large language models.
- Deep learning for large and disparate data sets.
- Human-systems integration and uncertainty analysis.

- Ethical, legal and societal aspects of AI (e.g. trust, bias, discrimination, privacy, etc.).
- Techniques to account for human factors (e.g., errors, biases) in the interpretation and use of data.
- Quantum Information Sciences, including quantum algorithm development, testing and costing.
- Emerging ubiquitous technical surveillance technologies and dynamics.

Situation awareness and multi-source assessment challenges

The ability to analyse and assess significant events and trends that impact on Australia's national security and interests (including political, strategic, environmental and economic developments as well as trends in adversarial behaviour, capability or investment in S&T). The ability to collaboratively analyse and synthesise evidence from multiple sources, and across multiple agencies, to produce timely, high quality and influential intelligence reports and assessments. The ability to articulate the basis and level of confidence in assessments.

Examples of research fields include:
- All-source intelligence integration and collaboration technologies.
- Political, strategic, economic and 'drivers of conflict' research and analysis including overt and covert propaganda and influence campaigns.
- Technology forecasting: emerging, critical and disruptive technologies including deficiencies and/or strengths in Australian capabilities (e.g. Quantum and AI).
- National Security implications of environmental change (e.g. forecasting certain climate change impacts) and health crises (e.g. epidemic, pandemic and agricultural impacts).
- Risk and resilience frameworks and measurements for security threats.
- Understanding and avoiding bias (e.g. algorithmic bias) and generating confidence measures for assessments.
- Enhancing cognition, comprehension, memory, learning and decision-making formally and in-the-field (e.g. visualisation).
- Detection of nefarious crowdsource fundraising.
- Identifying fundraising under false pretext to fund illicit activities.
- Emerging technology enabled fraudulent international transaction monitoring.
- The application of threat modelling and development of tools and strategies for cyber security resilience and information assurance.

Glossary

Applicant means the Administering Organisation.

Application means a request for funding submitted through ONI-RMS by an Administering Organisation seeking grant funding under a grant program. It includes the specifics of a proposed grant activity as well as the administrative information required to determine the eligibility of the application.

ARC means the Australian Research Council, as established under the ARC Act.

ARC Act means the *Australian Research Council Act 2001*.

ARC website means the website accessed using https://www.arc.gov.au/.

Assessment criteria means the specified principles or standards, against which applications will be considered. These criteria are also used to assess the merits of applications and, in the case of a competitive grant opportunity, to determine application rankings.

Australian National Intelligence community comprises the six agencies that formerly made up the Australian Intelligence Community (AIC) — ONA, the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), the Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organisation (AGO), the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) — as well as the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) and the intelligence functions of the Australian Federal Police (AFP), Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC) and The Department of Home Affairs.

Carriage 1 means the General Assessor with the primary responsibility for the application.

Conflict of Interest (COI) means any conflict of interest, any risk of a conflict of interest and any apparent conflict of interest arising through a party engaging in any activity, participating in any association, holding any membership or obtaining any interest that is likely to conflict with or restrict that party participating in the Grant. The ARC *Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy* is available on the ARC website.

Detailed Assessment means an assessment process completed by a Detailed Assessor which involves an in-depth assessment of applications. A Detailed Assessment provides scores and comments against the grant opportunity specific assessment criteria. The Detailed Assessment is then taken into consideration by General Assessors (i.e. CoE or SAC members) in the later stages of the peer review process.

Detailed Assessors means assessors drawn from the ARC's assessor community who are assigned applications to review for their specific expertise in a field of research.

FOR Codes means Fields of Research Codes as defined in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification* (ANZSRC) (2020).

Funding Entity means the RGS client who is funding the grant.

General Assessment means a review process completed by a General Assessor, taking into consideration the scores and comments provided by Detailed Assessors and the applicant Rejoinder. Scores on each of the relevant grant opportunity assessment criteria are provided as part of the General Assessment.

General Assessors means the members that make up a relevant grant opportunity's Selection Advisory Committee (SAC). General Assessors utilise knowledge of their disciplinary areas and a broad understanding of intellectual and methodological issues and good research planning. Each application has a lead General Assessor (known as Carriage 1) who is typically close to the academic field of the application, and one or more General Assessors (known as Other Carriages) with supplementary expertise.

GrantConnect is the Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CRGPs.

Grant Guidelines outline information for the relevant grant opportunity/ies relating to eligibility criteria, application process, assessment process, and any other additional accountability requirements that the ARC, on behalf of ONI, considers necessary.

NIDG means the *National Intelligence Discovery Grants* program, administered by RGS on behalf of ONI. NIDG was formerly known as the *National Intelligence and Security Discovery Research Grants* (NISDRG) program.

NIDG Delegate means the person in RGS who is authorised to approve decisions made by RGS on behalf of Funding Entities.

ONI means the Office of National Intelligence.

Other Carriage means the General Assessor with secondary or tertiary responsibility for the application.

Participant means all named participants on an application (ie. CIs, PIs); and all unnamed researchers such as postdoctoral researchers and postgraduate researchers working on a project.

Rejoinder means a process by which applicants are given an opportunity to respond to assessment comments made by Detailed Assessors via a written submission. Rejoinders are considered by the SAC during the moderation and shortlisting process.

RGS means **Research Grants Services**, a branch within the ARC established to provide grant provision services to external Australian Government departments for their grants within the research sector.

RGS Website means the website accessed using https://www.researchgrants.gov.au/

RMS means the Research Management System. Each grant opportunity under the NIDG program has a specific portal, through which applications, assessments, Rejoinders and the SAC meeting are managed. ID25 utilises the ONI RMS portal. Further information on RMS and links to the specific NIDG RMS portals can be found on the ARC's RMS information webpage.

RMS Meeting App refers to the RMS meeting application available to SAC members in preparation for/and at the selection meeting.

Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) means a group of experts from academia and industry appointed to assist the RGS to evaluate applications and to provide a shortlist of meritorious grants for funding, which will be provided to the funding agency/ies for approval. A SAC may be drawn from the ARC College of Experts.

Scoring Matrix refers a set of guidelines provided to assessors on the degree of merit associated with particular scores in relation to the NIDG grant opportunity assessment criteria.

SRO means the Senior Responsible Officer within RGS.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do I have to keep changing my password for RMS?

The Australian Research Council is a Government entity and as such, our systems must comply with the whole-of-government security policy. The Australian Government Information Security Manual is set out by the Australian Signals Directorate and is publicly available for you to access.

These polices are put in place to protect the information within Australian Government systems, including personal information relating to our RGS assessors. The increasing use of technology as a way of doing our business requires us to strengthen our information security.

What if I'm not sure if I have a conflict of interest or not?

The *ARC's Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy* provides guidance on conflicts. Further guidance is provided through *Identifying and Handling Conflicts of Interest in NCGP processes*. Where there is still doubt, assessors should email the RGS Team (NIDG)via ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au for advice.

What if I pick up eligibility issues as part of my assessment?

Eligibility is managed as a separate process to the peer review process. Any eligibility issues should be emailed to the RGS Team (NIDG) via ARC-NIDG@arc.gov.au for investigation. Assessments should be completed based on the merit of the application. It is important not to include potential eligibility issues in assessments.

Why can't I see the 'submit' button?

The most common reason for the 'submit' button not showing is because the applications you are reviewing have not been ranked. You must select your rankings for each group of equally scored applications before they can be submitted.

Why have I lost the assessments I have been working on?

The most common reason for assessments to be lost is when an assessor has two sessions of RMS open at the same time. It is best practice to only have one session of RMS open at a time and to ensure you save your assessments regularly.

For General Assessors

When do I submit my assessments?

General Assessors will be advised via email regarding the due date to save assessments in ONI-RMS, and the slightly later due date to submit assessments in ONI-RMS. You should not submit any assessments until after the Detailed Assessments have been completed and Rejoinders have closed. You should review the Detailed Assessments and Rejoinders and amend your initial scores if required. Your scores should then be saved in ONI-RMS (**not submitted**) by the earlier deadline, to facilitate discussion with your other carriages. Following this discussion, please submit your assessments by the final deadline.

Why can't I see the Detailed Assessments and Rejoinders?

You will not be able to view the Detailed Assessments or Rejoinders until those modules have been closed in ONI-RMS. You will be notified when you have access to the Detailed Assessments and Rejoinders.