

FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO 2020-21 INVESTMENT CALL

The feedback collated in this document was gathered across all stages of review of proposals submitted to the MLA annual call in the past years. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive report of feedback on how to improve proposals submitted to all MLA programs and does not make recommendations that guarantee success of future applications.

PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS | Producer Panel and general feedback

- Preliminary proposals must be succinct, **not exceeding 4 pages**, and adhere to the structure of the template provided. Proposals not meeting these requirements will be rejected automatically, regardless of content.
- The **title must not exceed 20 words** and should succinctly capture the essence and uniqueness of the proposal. Bland repetition of wording from the priorities listed in the Terms of Reference is especially discouraged.
- The **summary of no more than 200 words must be readily understood by a lay audience**. It should clearly convey the importance and relevance of the proposed work to panels of red meat producers who will assist MLA in the evaluation process and who may pay less attention to technical detail in the rest of the preliminary proposal. Remember, your preliminary proposal will be evaluated by highly experienced and knowledgeable producers as well as MLA managers. Well-constructed, easy-to-read proposals make it much easier for reviewers to assess their fit with regional priorities.
- The proposed work must **clearly address one or more priority/ies** or be clearly derived from one or more priority/ies in the Terms of Reference documents. Proposals that fail to identify a priority to address will be rejected automatically.
- The list of objectives should **focus on outputs or outcomes** related to a central research question or hypothesis and should not be confused with completion of work phases or milestones.
- Proposals should clearly state the **target livestock species**, e.g. sheep OR cattle OR both.
- **Adoption aspects should be well-designed and built into funded research projects** – consider adding experienced extension professionals to the project team to help design sound adoption pathways.
- Consider **the likely impact of the research** (i.e. its relevance) including clear consideration of the target market size, region(s), potential adoption, and economic impact of the research.
- **Avoid submitting several piecemeal projects** – rather consider:
 - **producer-researcher workshops** to align and develop systems-based proposals with clear commercial impact where the priorities are designed to deliver impact
 - **working with regional committees** to develop concepts that are/could be practical, deliver producer benefit and address NABRC/SALRC/WALRC priorities.

FULL PROPOSALS | Expert Panel feedback

- Write in plain English, i.e. avoid abbreviations and jargon, and describe the technical aspects clearly and concisely.
- Clearly describe **the benefit to industry**.
- **Justify assumptions** behind an industry benefit/cost analysis, and/or ask economists to review these assumptions.
- Carefully read and **adhere to the guidelines** for preparing MLA full proposals.

- Advice for **preparation of the title, project summary and selection of RD&A priorities is the same as for preliminary proposals** (see above). These items should match those in your preliminary proposal.
- As for the summary, the section on benefit to industry should be succinct (**no more than 200 words**) and **readily understood**. This section should be based on the benefit cost analysis (see below) and should avoid extravagant or unsupported claims. Remember, your proposal will be evaluated by highly experienced and knowledgeable MLA managers as well as an independent panel of scientists.
- The section on background and significance **should not exceed 2 pages**, including a list of cited references. Therefore, it must be concise and confined to material directly relevant to the proposal. Reference to relevant publications is important to provide context and identify knowledge gaps and research needs. However, space limitations will dictate careful selection of references.
- Advice on **preparation of objectives is as for preliminary proposals** (see above). These should link to but not reprise the proposed program of work.
- Undertaking a **meaningful benefit cost analysis** can be challenging for scientists who lack training or experience in this area. Where possible, principal investigators should seek advice from colleagues with training in agricultural economics or other relevant disciplines. Also, MLA managers are well-versed in benefit cost analytical procedures such as those employed by the Rendell McGuckian model.
- The 2019-20 annual call introduced **economic assessment of full proposals**, and the Expert Panel will evaluate the assumptions made for benefit cost analysis. More information will be available for proposals progressing to stage 2 in January 2020.
- Finally, give yourself time to prepare multiple drafts of your proposal, including input from co-investigators, industry producer panels, MLA managers and other experienced colleagues. Signs of hasty preparation usually are readily apparent to reviewers and can result in rejection of proposals that are based on a good idea but lack the expected levels of detail and organisation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is there opportunity for out-of-session (OOS) approval for a project that has been completed as part of the annual call process where results recommend piloting or continuation of the research in a similar vein? Is there the option to continue on via OOS approvals or does it get integrated into the annual call process for the next financial year?

- As a general rule projects will not be approved out-of-session. Projects are not approved out-of-session based on the success of a pilot project (usually a discrete project). The 2013 Livestock Production Innovation (LPI) Systems Review recommended there be no “back doors” for funding, i.e. that all MLA funding decisions should be open, fair, contestable and transparent.
- The priorities for each MLA annual call are advised by the Red Meat Panel as a result of regional consultation. A project proposal based on a successful pilot may be submitted to a subsequent MLA annual call if it addresses the annual RD&A priorities.
- Where a project funded by the MLA annual call develops a plan for a larger program of work, the delivery of the final plan may trigger the development of a strategic partnership (larger, longer term, highly collaborative program of work) – this may be developed separately to the MLA annual call, or alongside it.
- Please discuss options with the relevant MLA manager/s during the conduct of any pilot RD&A projects.

Should the risk criteria be included in the full application?

- MLA’s risk assessment criteria are incorporated in the full proposal template for the MLA annual call. The guidelines for completing the full proposal template describe how to complete the risk assessment.

Is there a list of projects in the public domain that have been funded or in the process of being funded via the annual call process?

- The list of sheepmeat and grassfed beef RD&A projects endorsed by the Red Meat Panel for funding through each MLA annual call is published on the MLA website at: <https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/funding-opportunities/annual-call/> under the heading at the bottom of the web page:
 - 2016/17 annual call – results
 - 2017/18 annual call – results
 - 2018/19 annual call – results – Please contact the relevant MLA R&D manager as outlined in the Terms of Reference
- Results will always be published on this page at the conclusion of each MLA annual call.

Is there opportunity to include some background reading to reduce the chance of duplication?

- Some background is provided in each Terms of Reference, including references to relevant final reports published on the MLA website.
- Please contact the MLA manager/s responsible for the relevant priorities in the Terms of Reference. Their contact details are supplied at the end of each Terms of Reference and they can provide more background to inform your review of past and current RD&A.
- Reviewers expect to see some evidence that the research team submitting the preliminary proposal has conducted a review of past literature.
- Contact your organisation’s representative on the regional committees and councils making up MLA’s regional consultation strategy. They hear and contribute to discussions on past and current RD&A and potential RD&A gaps to be addressed. Further, it is encouraged to contact the relevant regional chair for further input on your idea.

When will I be notified of the outcome of my preliminary or full proposal?

- Key dates for the MLA annual call for RD&A projects that address national sheepmeat and grassfed beef RD&A priorities are found on the MLA website [here](#). Please continue to check this webpage regularly for updates on the MLA annual call.

Appendix 1 – role of the Red Meat Panel

The Red Meat Panel:

- advises on priorities for the MLA RD&A portfolio and Terms of Reference (ToR) addressing the RD&A priorities for each annual call, taking into account:
 - national priorities
 - consolidated regional RD&A issues from the regional councils NABRC/SALRC/WALRC
 - feedback from the Producer Panels and the Expert Panel
- uses an evidence-based approach to assess the value of any issue put forward
- monitors and advises on MLA's portfolio balance across:
 - core funding areas
 - outcome type
 - RD&A type
 - time to impact
 - risk levels
 - research disciplines.

Appendix 2 – assessment criteria applied by the Expert Panel

Expert Panel members assess each full proposal using a 50:25:25 weighting based on:

- scientific quality and innovation (50)
- outcomes have realistic adoption targets and assumptions of industry impact (25)
- team quality, performance relative to opportunity and contribution to career development, particularly of early career researchers (25).

Please note these criteria are subject to change for 2019-20 annual call, but emphasis will still be on the criteria above

Appendix 3 – assessment criteria applied by Producer Panels

Producer Panels assess national and relevant regional (northern, southern, western) preliminary proposals submitted to MLA through the annual call to rank preliminary proposals against the following criteria:

- relevance of the problem the proposal is addressing
- fit with the annual research, development and adoption (RD&A) priorities
- benefit to sheepmeat and/or grassfed beef producers.