INVESTMENT DESIGN PACIFIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

A: Pacific Research Program

Start date: 1 July 2017 End Date: 30 June 2021

Total proposed funding allocation: \$20 million

Investment Concept (IC) approved by: FAS PAD IC Endorsed by AIC: N/A

Quality Assurance (QA) Completed: Independent Appraisal completed 20 February 2017

B: Executive Summary

High-quality research strengthens the evidence base on which sound policy-making and program design rests. It is valuable for policy-making and program design and delivery by Australia, the Pacific and partners around the world. But high-quality research on its own is not sufficient to shape sound policy-making and program design. Policy-relevant research needs to be available, accessible and communicated to the policy-making and program design community. This requires leadership with the ability to ensure research is available, accessible and communicated so as to inform and contribute to evidence-based policy-making and program design.

The Pacific Research Program will provide \$20 million over four years to fund high-quality, policy-relevant research that is available, accessible and communicated to the policy development and program design community in Australia, the Pacific and from around the world. Research undertaken through the program will focus on the intersection of politics, economy and power with the region's most pressing development challenges. The geographic scope of the program will be the Pacific region as a whole, with Melanesia as an area of particular interest.

DFAT will provide grant funding to an Australia-based research institution (or consortium) to deliver the program. The Program's research agenda will be independent of the Australian Government, but the relationship between DFAT and the research institution will be characterised by open, honest dialogue to ensure that the program's research remains relevant to the needs of policy-makers and program designers in Australia, the Pacific region and from around the world.

The Pacific Research Program aims to contribute to the goal of economic resilience, poverty reduction, security and stability in the Pacific region. It will support that goal by contributing to sound policy-making and program design by the Government of Australia and its partner governments and organisations, through the provision of relevant evidence, effectively communicated.

The following end-of-program outcomes will contribute to that goal:

- i. Achievement of a globally pre-eminent centre of excellence for research on the Pacific that:
 - a. Produces high-quality policy relevant research that is available, accessible and communicated to policy makers and program designers in Australia, the Pacific and from around the world
 - b. Plays a central role in fostering and facilitating a strong and vibrant Pacific-Australia-New Zealand-wide network of research on the Pacific
 - c. Is connected to Australia's broader engagement with the Pacific and fosters a greater knowledge and understanding of the Pacific among the Australian community
 - d. Demonstrates through external mid-term peer review a high degree of effectiveness in contributing to evidence-based policy-making and program design primarily in Australia and also the Pacific and around the world.

Six intermediate outcomes will underpin those end-of-program outcomes:

- Accessible research products and in-person interactions effectively communicate and make available relevant research findings to Australian and Pacific island policy-makers and program designers
- ii. Research products are publicly available
- iii. An international network of researchers is cultivated
- iv. The next generation of Australian researchers of the Pacific region is developed
- v. Greater research and communication capacity among Pacific island country researchers
- vi. Accessible research products and media interactions effectively communicate relevant research findings to the Australian public

A competitive grant process will invite research institutions to propose their own unique approach to achieving those outcomes. Bidders will articulate their approach, and demonstrate their capacity to deliver, according to six capabilities, which will form the selection criteria for the competitive grants process:

- i. Delivery of a high-quality program of research, including developing the capacity of up-and-coming Australian and Pacific Islander researchers
- ii. Exercising influence through outstanding leadership
- iii. Communicating and making research findings available and accessible to the Australian and Pacific region policy-making and program design community, and the broader public
- iv. Monitoring and evaluating research-driven policy influence
- v. Delivering on DFAT's cross-cutting priorities
- vi. Co-funding and/or co-contribution

Once a preferred bidder has been identified based on assessment of proposals, they will participate in an independently facilitated workshop with DFAT to discuss and agree details of the program. This workshop will broker the partnership and facilitate co-design of some elements of the program, such as the communication strategy and the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. The workshop will also establish agreed principles and structures for the partnership, reflecting mutual obligations, and an agreed research agenda for the first year of the program.

C: Analysis and Strategic Context

It is in Australia's national interest to support the Pacific region's development and economic prosperity. Economic resilience, poverty reduction, security and stability in the Pacific region are high priorities for DFAT and the broader Government of Australia. DFAT's Pacific Regional program – which represents around 20% of DFAT's aid to the Pacific – is focused on supporting development interventions that are more cost effective when delivered regionally, rather than bilaterally. The Pacific Regional program's Aid Investment Plan sets out four primary objectives: economic growth, effective regional institutions, healthy and resilient communities, and empowering women and girls.1

Research is highly valuable for development policy-making, by the Government of Australia, its partner governments in the Pacific, other international partners and civil society. Research strengthens the evidence base upon which sound policy-making rests. This was acknowledged by the 2015 Office of Development Effectiveness evaluation of DFAT's research investments, the 2014 Senate Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Aid and Development Assistance Program and the 2011 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness. The ODE evaluation further emphasised that "research is critical to facilitating development innovation," which is central to Australia's aid policy. DFAT is not the only Australian Government consumer of Pacific-focused research – the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Office of National Assessments and other agencies also value research of this kind.

Research is also valued by a range of non-government entities, including civil society, academia, individuals and inter-governmental bodies. In this way, Australian Government-funded research on the Pacific creates a regional as well as a global public good, with a wide range of consumers. It helps to create an informed constituency for Australia's ongoing engagement in the Pacific.

But high quality research on its own is not sufficient to shape sound policy-making. Policy and program-relevant research needs to be available, accessible and communicated to the policy-making and program design community. This requires leadership with the ability to exercise influence within the various policy-making communities. It also requires research products (such as published articles, research summaries, blog posts and briefing papers) and in-person interactions (such as one-on-one meetings, round table discussions and conferences) tailored to the needs of a policy audience.

DFAT has funded Pacific-focused research through SSGM since 1996. Under the current funding arrangement, DFAT provides a core funding grant for SSGM to: undertake and disseminate Pacific-related research; strengthen links to fellow research institutions with a focus on the Pacific; and train the next generation of Pacific researchers.

DFAT also funds a number of other geographically focused research programs at academic institutions within Australia and overseas. For example, the Indonesia Project and the Philippines Project, both at ANU. In recent years, around 60 per cent of DFAT's research investment has gone to Australian research institutions, usually through multi-year partnership and grant arrangements.³

¹ DFAT Pacific Regional Aid Investment Plan 2015-16 to 2018-19. http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/pacific-regional-aid-investment-plan-2015-19.pdf. Accessed 2/1/17.

² Office of Development Effectiveness. Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments, ODE, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. February 2015

³ Office of Development Effectiveness. Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments, ODE, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. February 2015

There are a number of lessons learned that are relevant to the future of DFAT's support for Pacific research, drawn from DFAT's own experience in funding research as well as the experience of other donors. Key lessons include:

i. There are barriers to policy-makers' uptake of research

The 2015 Office of Development Effectiveness evaluation of DFAT's research investments found that uptake of research by DFAT staff and programs was below potential.⁴ This was especially the case with 'public good' research, as opposed to specifically commissioned research. With high staff turnover and busy schedules, DFAT staff are often unaware of research activity that is highly relevant to their work, or are generally aware of its existence but don't know how to access it. Pro-active dissemination by the research institution is required. There is a strong appetite for succinct research products that make explicit policy recommendations rather than present general findings. Many policy-makers lack the time to engage with weighty written research products. These constraints are likely to be even greater – compounded by distance, language and cultural barriers – for the policy-making community in the Pacific region.

ii. In-person interaction between researchers and policy-makers has great value

Direct interpersonal relationships facilitate the take-up of research, and enable two-way dialogue on areas of policy and research interest. The ODE evaluation called for a more dynamic interaction between researchers and policy-makers.⁵ A 2010 review of the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) research uptake concluded that interpersonal relationships were a key determinant in successful uptake of research into policy and programming.⁶ DFAT staff have a strong appetite for in-person interactions such as seminars, round-tables and one-on-one discussions. While the ODE evaluation also identified the need for intermediary 'knowledge brokers' within DFAT to keep their colleagues informed of relevant research activities, there are insufficient staff resources for the DFAT program manager responsible for the Pacific Research Program to play that role alone, and direct relationships between researchers and policy-makers should be encouraged.

iii. Long-term partnerships characterised by honest dialogue yield the best results

Ongoing engagement over an extended period of time helps to align expectations, and to improve mutual understanding of the utility of different forms of research. "Long-term, communicative research relationships improve the likelihood of researchers producing program-relevant research, and of DFAT staff using primary research".7 Program governance and management arrangements should be straightforward, regular and consistently adhered to. They should also span both senior management and working level interaction between DFAT and the research institution.

iv. Research programs can be influential vehicles for supporting evidence-based policy-making and program design in Australia's partner countries

⁴ Office of Development Effectiveness. Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments, ODE, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. February 2015.

s Office of Development Effectiveness. Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments, ODE, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. February 2015.

⁶ Jones and Mendizabal. Strengthening Learning from research and evaluation: Going with the grain, Overseas Development Institute, London. September 2010.

⁷ Office of Development Effectiveness. Research for better aid: an evaluation of DFAT's investments, ODE, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. February 2015. p.46.

Research institutions' international reputation for academic rigour, combined with independence from the Government of Australia, makes research institutions a trusted source of policy advice for partner governments in the region. For example, the Indonesia Project at ANU has a long history of active and influential engagement in economic policy deliberation in Indonesia. Influential leadership, strong networks and powerful communication of research findings is required to fully capitalise on this potential.

D: Investment Description

The Pacific Research Program will provide \$20 million over four years to fund high-quality, policy-relevant research that makes a demonstrable, peer-reviewed contribution to evidence-based policy-making and program design. The program will build on DFAT's current investment into Pacific Research.

The program will be delivered by a research institution (or consortium). The Program's research agenda will be independent of the Australian Government, but the relationship between DFAT and the research institution will be characterised by open, honest dialogue to ensure that the program's research remains relevant to the needs of policy-makers in Australia and the Pacific region.

Logic and Expected Outcomes

The Pacific Research Program aims to contribute to the goal of economic resilience, poverty reduction, security and stability in the Pacific region. It will support that goal by contributing to sound policy-making and program design by the Government of Australia and its partner governments and organisations, through the provision of relevant evidence, effectively communicated.

The following end-of-program outcomes will contribute to that goal:

- i. Achievement of a globally pre-eminent centre of excellence for research on the Pacific that
 - a. Produces high quality policy relevant research that is available, accessible that is communicated to policy makers and program designers in Australia, the Pacific and rom around the world
 - b. Plays a central role in fostering and facilitating a strong and vibrant Pacific-Australia-New Zealand-wide network of research on the Pacific
 - c. Is connected to Australia's broader engagement with Pacific and fosters a greater knowledge and understanding of the Pacific among the Australian community
 - d. Demonstrates through external peer review a high degree of effectiveness in contributing to evidence-based policy-making and program design primarily in Australia and also the Pacific and around the world.

Six intermediate outcomes will underpin those end-of-program outcomes:

- Accessible research products and in-person interactions effectively communicate and make available relevant research findings to Australian and Pacific island policy-makers and program designers
- ii. Research products are publicly available
- iii. An international network of researchers is cultivated
- iv. The next generation of Australian researchers of the Pacific region is developed
- v. Greater research and communication capacity among Pacific island country researchers
- vi. Accessible research products and media interactions effectively communicate relevant research findings to the Australian public

The staffing structure and the composition of outputs to achieve the above outcomes will be negotiated between DFAT and the preferred bidder, based on the bidder's proposal in a competitive grant process.

The draft Theory of Change for the Pacific Research Program is presented in a diagram at Annex 2.

Geographic and sectoral scope

The geographic scope of the Pacific Research Program will be the Pacific region as a whole, though Melanesia will be an area of particular interest in line with Australia's geographic location and national interests. Timor Leste does not fall within the geographic scope of this program, though it may from time to time be pertinent to a particular research project funded through the Pacific Research Program.

The sectoral focus of the Pacific Research Program will be on the intersection of politics, economy and power with the region's most pressing development challenges. We envisage refining the current six priority areas of research during the grant negotiation phase to reflect this sectoral focus. Possible priority areas of research to be discussed with bidders could include:

- i. Economic resilience and the role of the private sector
- ii. Politics and governance
- iii. The politics and effectiveness of program design and delivery
- iv. Gender and inclusiveness
- v. Security and stability, including Bougainville
- vi. Pacific regionalism

The research agenda will not be dictated by DFAT. Academic independence is an important principle of the program. One of the strengths of academia is that researchers pose questions policy-makers haven't thought of yet. Nor will the research agenda be solely determined by the research institution. The program's governance and management structure will facilitate dialogue between DFAT and the research institution to agree a research agenda that is driven by the research institution and of ongoing relevance to Australian government and partner government policy-making and program design.

The successful research institution will be encouraged to build or strengthen links with other similar research programs and universities primarily in the Pacific, New Zealand and also around the world to build networks for Pacific Researchers and improve the dissemination of information across the Pacific.

Delivery Approach

The Pacific Research Program will be funded through a grant provided to an Australian-based research institution (or research consortium). The grantee will be determined through a competitive grant process conducted in the first half of 2017.

The grant will fund both research and research communication/advocacy functions. Influencing policy and program design — in Australia and in the region — requires the combination of both high-quality research and effective communication and thought leadership. The grantee's primary

partnership will be with the Government of Australia, but it will also build strong relationships with partner governments throughout the Pacific region, other international partners and civil society.

Regular partnership dialogue between DFAT and the grantee will be established to ensure the ongoing relevance of research topics and communication strategy. However, the research institution will retain its academic independence. The Pacific Research Program is not a mechanism for DFAT to commission specific pieces of research.

The details of partnership dialogue structures, monitoring and evaluation approach, and other elements of the program will be co-designed with the grantee. This will take place through a facilitated Partnership Workshop involving senior management and working level staff from both DFAT and the preferred bidder, as part of funding agreement negotiations. The Partnership Workshop will take place in June 2017.

An Australia-based grant arrangement decided through a competitive process was determined to provide the greatest value-for-money. Requiring the research institution or consortium to be Australia-based serves Australia's national interest by increasing Australians' engagement with the pacific, enhancing Australia's soft power and influence in the region, and ensuring an ongoing focus on issues of greatest interest to Australia. A grant arrangement establishes a partnership between DFAT and the grantee rather than a purely client-provider relationship, and reflects the public good this program aims to generate. A competitive process to determine the grant recipient encourages competition, stimulates innovation and provides assurance of value-for-money by testing the market.

Resources

The budget allocation for the Pacific Research Program is \$20 million over four years. This allocation reflects the importance given for high quality research in the Pacific. It maintains the current allocation for Pacific Research. The grant funding will be spread across the four years, with a slightly reduced total in Year One (2017-18) in recognition of mobilisation lead time. Procurement will be conducted through a competitive grant process open to all Australian institutions and Australian institution-led consortia with demonstrated capacity to deliver the services. The competitive grant process will take place in the first half of 2017. Financial provision has been made for a mid-term independent peer review of the program to be undertaken in Year Three (2019-20) to inform the future of DFAT funding to Pacific research. The mid-term review team will be commissioned by DFAT in consultation with the grantee.

Bidders will propose how they intend to allocate the grant funding to the various components of a research program in order to achieve the outcomes sought by DFAT. Proposals will indicate an allocation of the funds to the various costs involved such as staffing, operating costs, research costs, communication, events, monitoring and evaluation etc.

DFAT will invite bidders to co-fund the program. DFAT's objectives in this program align with those of many potential bidders, and expects that some bidders will be willing and able to propose co-funding and/or co-contribution to the research program. This is not compulsory, but will have some weighting in the procurement selection criteria.

On average, approximately 0.4 of a full-time equivalent (FTE) position will be allocated to managing the program by DFAT. This program manager will invest time in building and maintaining relationships with researchers to optimise communication between DFAT and the research institution/consortium. In addition, management and partnership dialogue will require periodic engagement from the relevant Director, Assistant Secretary and First Assistant Secretary.

DFAT staff working in relevant policy and program areas will need to allocate time – and be incentivised by senior management to allocate time – to engage meaningfully with the Pacific Research Program. While the research institution is responsible for taking all reasonable measures to communicate research to the policy-making community through appropriate products and forums for in-person interaction, it is also incumbent on DFAT staff to be proactive in engaging with these products and forums.

E: Implementation Arrangements

Procurement

Market capacity among Australian-based research institutions is sufficient to ensure a competitive field of proposals for the Pacific Research Program. This assessment is based on a desk review of Australian institutions engaged in Pacific-focused research, along with discussions between DFAT senior management and a number of Australian research institutions. To be eligible to apply for the Pacific Research Program, bidders must be either an Australia-based research institution or a consortium led by an Australia-based research institution.

Grant disbursement will be on a pre-payment basis, with annual tranche payments. Formal reporting on the grants will be minimal. At the end of each year the Pacific Research Program will submit a six-page Annual Activity Report which will: very briefly summarise the year's activities; highlight key achievements and lessons learned; and acquit expenditure for the year. Provided that at least 75% of the previous tranche has been acquitted, the Annual Activity Report will be the trigger for payment of the next tranche. Performance management will be undertaken through the governance and management arrangements outlined below.

An open-minded approach to market

This design recognises the diversity of capabilities, interests and approaches of potential bidders for this program. The competitive grant process has been designed to fully test the market by allowing bidders to articulate their own approach to the delivery of the program, rather than responding to an approach dictated by DFAT.

A competitive grant process will be undertaken. First, DFAT will publish an open call for proposals from Australian-based research institutions and research consortia. The call for proposals will articulate DFAT's objectives and intentions for how it will engage with the program. Bidders will submit proposals outlining their proposed approach to delivering those objectives in partnership with DFAT, and demonstrating their capacity to deliver. Second, a facilitated Partnership Workshop will be held involving DFAT and the preferred bidder to discuss and agree details of the approach.

Through the proposal process, bidders will articulate their approach to achieving the program outcomes. **Bidders will articulate their proposed approach to, and their capacity to deliver, each of six capabilities**, which will form the selection criteria for DFAT's selection of a partner.

The six capabilities, and their relative weighting as selection criteria, are as follows:

i. Delivery of a high-quality program of research, including developing the capacity of upand-coming Australian and Pacific Islander researchers

How will the research program be organised? What staffing profile is required? Describe the suite of research activities to be undertaken. What is the proposed research agenda, for Year One and in broad terms for the life of the program? What outreach and network building will be conducted? How will the capacity of researchers and partner research institutions be built? What else is required to deliver the end-of-program outcomes?

The weighting of this selection criteria will be 40%

ii. Exercising influence through outstanding leadership

Who will lead the program? Who will be the leading figures associated with the program? How will this person/people exercise influence in the Australian policy-making and program design community? How will they exercise influence in the policy-making and program design communities in the Pacific region? How will they influence public discourse in Australia?

The weighting of this selection criteria will be 15%

iii. Communicating research findings to the Australian and Pacific region policy-making and program design community, and the broader public

What is the program's strategy for proactively communicating with influence? Who will be the target audiences? What products will communicate research findings to the various audiences? What interactions will facilitate discussion about research findings with policymakers? What networks will be cultivated and/or utilised? How will the program engage with the Australian public?

The weighting of this selection criteria will be 15%

iv. Monitoring and evaluating research-driven policy influence

How will the program capture and present data on policy influence? How will the program demonstrate progress towards and achievement of the end-of-program outcomes?

The weighting of this selection criteria will be 15%

v. Delivering on DFAT's cross-cutting priorities

How will gender equality and disability inclusiveness be addressed through the research agenda? How will the program advance gender equality and promote empowerment of women and girls in the way it is conducted? How will the program consider and promote disability inclusiveness in the way it is conducted? How will the program strengthen links with and involvement of the Australian research community working on indigenous issues in Australia? What linkages to the private sector will be created, in Australia and overseas?

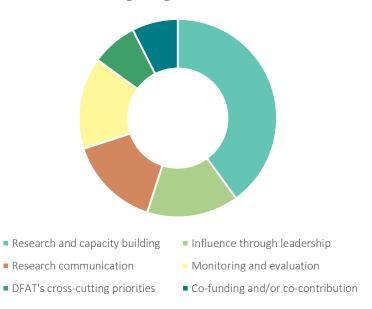
The weighting of this selection criteria will be 7.5%

vi. Co-funding and/or co-contribution

Will the bidder provide co-funding to the program? What (if any) in-kind contributions will be provided by the bidder? Are there opportunities to leverage other funding (for example, from the private sector) to support achievement of the end-of-program outcomes? How will the bidder provide value-for-money?

The weighting of this selection criteria will be 7.5%

Relative weighting of selection criteria



Proposals will also provide:

- i. A response to DFAT's proposed governance structures, outlining how the bidder will participate
- ii. A proposed budget, in line with the approach outlined in the proposal
- iii. A mobilisation plan, outlining how the program will be fully established within six months

Once a preferred bidder has been identified based on assessment of proposals, a Partnership Workshop will be held with the preferred bidder to discuss and agree details of the program. This step is more substantial than mere negotiation of a funding agreement (which will follow after the workshop). It is a partnership-brokering process which will facilitate co-design of elements of the program, based on the approach outlined in the bidder's proposal. The workshop will be facilitated by an independent party, and will involve senior management and working level staff from both DFAT and the preferred bidder. DFAT's engagement in the Partnership Workshop will be informed by the views of staff throughout the Pacific Division, which will be gathered by circulating the preferred proposal to relevant sections of the division for comment. The workshop will ensure DFAT and the preferred bidder understand one another's objectives and ways of working.

Outcomes of the workshop will include:

- i. Agreed principles and structures for partnership management and dialogue, reflecting mutual obligations
- ii. An agreed research agenda for Year One (2017-18)
- iii. An agreed communication strategy, including a suite of products and interactions to disseminate the findings of research activities and promote constructive policy debate
- iv. An agreed approach to monitoring and evaluation

Governance structure and management arrangements

A clear governance structure and engaged program management are required to ensure the Pacific Research Program remains on track to achieve the end-of-program outcomes. In particular, the structure and arrangements must ensure that the research agenda remains relevant to policy-makers and the research communication is effective. The structure and arrangements must facilitate honest dialogue between DFAT and the research institution at an appropriate level of seniority, and will be an important mechanism for addressing problems and frustrations as they arise. They must be flexible to adapt to changed priorities and personnel over time, but also provide certainty that the partnership will be characterised by open communication and mutual responsiveness throughout the life of the program.

Bidders should note that DFAT may require the successful bidders to liaise and discuss issues, as requested by DFAT, in relation to other DFAT-funded Pacific initiatives such as Pacific Connect, the Women's Leadership Initiative and the Pacific Governance and Leadership Precinct and on the potential for further alignment or consolidation with such initiatives.

The Pacific Research Program Governance Committee will meet four times a year to discuss the current research agenda, and progress towards achieving the end-of-program outcomes. The Governance Committee will consist of:

- DFAT First Assistant Secretary for the Pacific
- DFAT Director responsible for the Pacific Research Partnership
- A representative from the Office of National Assessments' (ONA) Oceania Branch
- A senior representative of the research institution
- The Pacific Research Program team leader

The quarterly governance meetings will be the primary forum for dialogue on the research agenda and communication strategy. Every fourth meeting will consider and approve an annual research plan for the forthcoming year. Ahead of each fourth meeting, DFAT will consult within the department (especially posts) and with other relevant departments to seek views on the research agenda. In advance of each quarterly meeting, the research institution will send to DFAT – for information, not for approval – an up-to-date work plan for the Program.

Week-to-week program management will be characterised by a close working relationship between the DFAT Program Manager and the research institution's Pacific Research Program team leader. DFAT will allocate a Program Manager (approximately 0.4 FTE) to be the primary point of liaison between DFAT and the research institution, under the direction of the relevant DFAT Director. The Program Manager will liaise directly with the Pacific Research Program team leader, and will also remain in contact with key researchers on the program in order to remain generally informed about the research currently under way. Frequent communication will also facilitate cooperation on, for example, coordinating engagement with visiting senior officials from the region. DFAT expects that the research institution will be pro-active in keeping the DFAT Program Manager and other relevant DFAT staff informed about developments in the research and associated activities.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

Bidders will articulate their approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning in their proposal. The grantee will develop a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF) for the program, articulating how it will capture relevant data and measure progress towards the program outcomes. The MELF will be developed in line with the approach articulated in the research institution's proposal, and informed by DFAT's input at the Partnership Workshop. It will cover the entire four years of the program, and will be updated periodically to reflect changes to the program. This design avoids being overly prescriptive in setting out an approach to MEL, in order to allow bidders to propose a MEL approach that aligns with their unique approach.

Measuring the impact of research programs on policy-making and program design is difficult. Results are often dependant on factors beyond the control of the program, in particular the will of policy-makers to act on evidence presented. Unexpected results (positive and negative) are common. It is difficult to conclusively attribute positive policy change to the work of a research program, because policy-making processes are invariably complex and frequently opaque. In addition, positive policy changes may not be realised until years after the research program has ceased (or ceased to monitor the impact of its interventions). Despite these difficulties, the Pacific Research Program will track its contribution to the end-of-program outcomes (not just outputs) to the extent possible.

The purpose of the MELF is threefold:

- **Accountability:** Mutual accountability between DFAT and the research institution, and accountability to the Australian taxpayers.
- **Performance:** Assessing how well the program is being delivered, and how effective it is in achieving the end-of-program outcomes.
- Learning: Understanding what works, what doesn't and why.

The grantee's approach to MEL should be characterised by:

- **Minimal formal reporting:** Achievements and lessons learned should be primarily communicated through dialogue with DFAT, at the working level and through the Governance Committee, not through large written reports.
- A focus on outcomes over outputs: While data should be collected on both, the emphasis of the MELF should be on measuring and communicating the program's contribution to program outcomes, rather than mere outputs.
- An emphasis on learning: Internalising and sharing lessons learned in order to improve performance is more important than making a judgement on performance to date.
- **Use of quantitative and qualitative data:** The MELF should capture both quantitative and qualitative data in order to track the program's contribution to the fullest extent possible.
- Mutual accountability: In the spirit of partnership, the MELF should also capture data on the quantity and quality of DFAT (and other Australian Government agencies) interaction with the program.

Outcome level performance indicators should focus on assessing how the work of the Pacific Research Program contributes to policy-making debates, both in Australia and in the Pacific region. This could be measured through, for example, surveys of influential stakeholders. It could be demonstrated, for example, through case studies that present stories of change to which the program contributed.

Output level performance indicators should focus on:

- Number of outputs
- Quality of outputs
- Relevance to the intended audience
- Ease of access for the intended audience
- Usefulness to the intended audience
- Extent to which outputs build capacity
- · Compliance with child protection safeguards

Relevant measurements might include surveys of stakeholders, number of downloads and views, number of mentions in the media, attendance at events, size of networks, number of subscribers, and demand for further work in a particular research area, among others.

MEL reporting should be streamlined and integrated into program governance and management. The quarterly meetings of the Governance Committee should be the primary forum for communicating key achievements and lessons learned to DFAT, and the meetings will have a standing agenda item for a report to be given. Key achievements and learnings of the program will be reported annually in the six-page Annual Activity Report.

DFAT will undertake an independent mid-term review of the Pacific Research Program in 2019-20. The review will assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. It will seek to understand the enablers of, and obstacles to, achievement of the program's objectives. The review will have a forward-looking emphasis, to learn lessons from the Pacific Research Program (and its predecessors) to inform the future of DFAT funding to Pacific-focused research. It will specifically consider the merits, or otherwise, of procuring the Pacific Research Program through a competitive grant process. The midterm review team will be commissioned by DFAT in consultation with the research institution.

Sustainability

The Australian Government has an ongoing need for Pacific-focused, policy relevant research. This will be the case for decades to come, and will likely require government funding of some kind on an ongoing basis. The Pacific Research Program will ensure that required expertise continues to reside in Australia.

The Pacific Research Program seeks to build the base of financial supporters for Pacific-focused, policy relevant research. Co-funding is invited for the program itself, and opportunities are sought to leverage additional funding from the private sector and elsewhere.

Building the capacity of researchers, and developing research networks, are primary objectives of the program. The impact of this capacity building and network development will last well beyond the four years of the Pacific Research Program.

Gender equality

The Pacific Research Program will address gender equality and women's empowerment, through both the research agenda and the way the program is run. DFAT's Gender Equality and Women's

Empowerment Strategy⁸ sets out three priorities that guide DFAT's work in this area, with which the Pacific Research Program will be aligned:

- Enhancing women's voice in decision-making, leadership and peace-building
- Promoting women's economic empowerment
- Ending violence against women and girls.

Gender equality and women's empowerment will be priority issues included on the research agenda of the Pacific Research Program. DFAT will make it clear to bidders through the Call for Proposals that these issues should be included on bidders' proposed research agenda, and will ensure that continues to be the case through dialogue at Governance Committee meetings.

In addition, bidders will be required to outline their approach to advancing gender equality and promoting empowerment of women and girls in the way the Pacific Research Program itself is conducted. This approach will be assessed as part of a selection criteria worth 7.5%.

Disability inclusiveness

The Pacific Research Program will support disability inclusiveness, through both the research agenda and the way the program is run. The Program's approach will be aligned with the four guiding principles set out in DFAT's strategy on disability inclusiveness9:

- Support an active and central role for people with disabilities: 'Nothing about us without us'
- Develop policies and programs based on evidence
- Take into account the interaction of gender and disabilities
- Improve inclusion of a diverse range of people with disabilities

Bidders will be required to outline their approach to addressing disability inclusiveness through the Pacific Research Program, in line with the principles above. This approach will be assessed as part of a selection criteria worth 7.5%.

Private sector

The private sector is not well-placed to deliver the Pacific Research Program. While private sector actors may form part of bidding consortia, it is unlikely that a private sector entity would have sufficient capacity and experience to compete with established academic and research institutions for delivery of the Program on its own.

Nonetheless, there are some potential avenues for engagement with the private sector. For example, linkages may be made with the private sector in the interests of building influential networks in the Pacific, or in communicating research findings to the Australian public, or through sponsorship of particular events. Bidders will be asked to outline their approach to creating linkages with the private sector, as part of a selection criteria worth 7.5%.

⁸ DFAT Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, February 2016. http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.pdf.

⁹ Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program, May 2015. http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-for-all-2015-2020.aspx.

Risk management

The Pacific Research Program is a low risk program. Relative to other parts of the Australian aid program, providing funding to Australian research institutions to undertake and communicate research presents a very low level of risk to DFAT.

Nonetheless, there are several risks that should be considered and mitigated on an ongoing basis, including:

- i. Some political actors in the region may impede the research institution's ability to undertake research and communicate its findings.
- ii. DFAT may suffer reputational damage, through association with badly-received research findings.
- iii. DFAT budget fluctuations may impede effectiveness and damage relationships.

Risk will be a standing agenda item for discussion at Governance Committee meetings. That discussion will be informed by internal consideration of risk within DFAT and within the research institution in the lead-up to the quarterly meetings. In this way, DFAT will update the Risk Register quarterly.

Safeguards

There are child protection risks associated with this program. While the program will not involve personnel working with children, it is likely that research activities undertaken through the program will involve contact with or access to children. The research institution will be required to have a child protection policy in place that meets the requirements of DFAT's child protection standards. Child protection issues will be considered as part of the risk discussion at quarterly Governance Committee meetings.

There are no environmental risks, or risks related to displacement and resettlement arising from the Pacific Research Program.

Annex 1: Draft Theory of Change Economic resilience, poverty reduction, security and stability in the Pacific region **GOAL** 9 10 8 Is connected to Australia's broader Produces high-quality policy relevant Plays a central role in fostering Demonstrates through external peer review a END-OFand facilitating a strong and research that is available, accessible engagement with Pacific and fosters high degree of effectiveness in contributing to **PROGRAM** and communicated to policy makers vibrant Pacific-Australia-New greater knowledge and evidence-based policy-making and program **OUTCOMES** Zealand-wide network of research understanding of the Pacific among design primarily in Australia and also the Pacific and program designers in Australia, the Pacific and from around the world on the Pacific the Australian community and around the world. The next Accessible research products and in-person products and media products international INTERMEDIATE interactions effectively communicate and make interactions effectively researchers of network of **OUTCOMES** available relevant research findings to Pacific communicate relevant the Pacific among Pacific Island Country policy-makers research findings to the Island Country available is cultivated Assumptions of how proposed outputs will support intermediate outcomes to be articulated by bidders **OUTPUTS**

Research, communication and capacity-building activities, as articulated in preferred bidder's proposal and agreed with DFAT

Assumptions:

- 1. Supporting up-and-coming researchers will ensure ongoing research and communication capability of the research community in Australia in the long-term.
- 2. Building the capacity of Pacific Island Country researchers will enhance their capacity to provide policy-related evidence.
- 3. High-quality research made freely available to the public will be accessed by a range of stakeholders.
- 4. Networks will provide the forum for coalescing of influential coalitions for change.
- 5. High-quality research placed in the hands of policy-makers will be considered by policy-makers in their decision-making.
- 6. Communicating research findings to the public in an accessible way will increase general knowledge of the Pacific.
- 7. In the long-term, a cohort of researchers providing a robust evidence base will lead to better policy decisions.
- 8. Use of high-quality, policy-relevant research by a range of stakeholders will increase demand for sound policy-making.
- 9. Use of high-quality, policy-relevant research by policy-makers will lead to better policy decisions.
- 10. Greater knowledge of the Pacific among the Australian community will strengthen the domestic constituency for ongoing, constructive engagement by Australia in the Pacific region.