



# **AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

**RESEARCH PROGRAM**

**Policy and Guidelines**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Australian Football League (AFL) is one of the most innovative and professional sporting competitions in the World. The AFL is committed to providing the best playing and training conditions and programs for its players, coaches and staff.

For almost ten years the AFL has been active in researching all areas related to sports science, sports medicine and game evolution and further investigating issues related to injury prevention, coaching and performance in Australian Football.

The AFL Commission first appointed the AFL Research Board in 1999, establishing this body to administer the selection of research priorities and oversee the allocation of funding. The first round of funded projects commenced in 2000.

In the initial years of the program many and varied applications were submitted and over time the process has been streamlined to ensure that best-practice method is used for capturing the most relevant research topics and undertaking projects that will be most beneficial for the game.

The projects prioritised for funding will be research topics generated by AFL Clubs and other nominated peak football bodies. The AFL Commission, AFL Football Operations Department and AFL Game Development Department also have the capacity to nominate topics that should be allocated priority status.

Projects will be funded where it can be demonstrated that they cover specific areas of interest to the AFL Clubs or the development of the game across all levels of competition.

## 2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The AFL Research Program is administered by the AFL Research Board, a committee within the AFL Football Operations Department. The AFL Research Board currently comprises:

Dr. Ross Smith	(Chairman) Former AFL Senior Coach
Brian Cook	Chief Executive Officer, Geelong FC
Prof Mark Hargreaves	Dept of Physiology, University of Melbourne
Dr. Peter Harcourt	Medical Commissioner, AFL
Paul Lew	Physiotherapist, Essendon FC
David Parkin	Former AFL Senior Coach
Dr. Hugh Seward	Executive Officer, AFL Medical Officers Association
Lawrie Woodman	National Coaching and Volunteers Manager, AFL
Shane McCurry	Football Operations Officer, AFL (Secretary)

The AFL Research Board personnel cover a broad range of disciplines ranging from medicine and sports science through to coaching premierships and administrative success.

The vast credentials and experiences of this group ensures that all research areas are given adequate consideration and that projects undertaken will produce a broad cross section of material that can be applied within a variety of domains.

### 3. PURPOSE

The main objective of the AFL Research Program is to provide information to AFL Clubs and the Australian football community that will:

- a) upgrade coaching methodology;
  - b) enhance player management and preparation;
  - c) improve safety in football;
  - d) investigate the evolution of the AFL game and related trends;
  - e) advance the appreciation of coaches and administrators with respect to the value and potential contribution of sports science and medical research;
- and
- f) encourage clubs to adopt a more systematic approach to sports science and medical research.

All research projects must be designed to provide information that can be applied. The transmission of results to the AFL, AFL Clubs, State football bodies and Australian football community is a critical component of the AFL Research Program.

## 4. TYPES OF PROJECTS

Applications will be considered for research projects within or across the following academic disciplines:

- Biochemistry
- Biomechanics
- Coaching
- Epidemiology
- History
- Nutrition
- Physiology
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Sports medicine
- Player Management

Projects that fall within these categories may include:

- Ergogenic aids and doping control
- Facility and equipment design
- Game trends / Evolution of the game
- Injury patterns and statistics
- Medical monitoring of footballers
- Player development / welfare / career issues
- Prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of injury
- Recovery strategies
- Safety
- Social aspects
- Strategy and tactics
- Surface research
- Talent identification programs
- Training methods

## 5. FUNDING

AFL Research Program funding will be allocated on an annual basis and the total amount allocated is to be continually reviewed in light of the number of ongoing projects, the changing needs of the football industry and the priorities of the AFL.

The AFL Research Board will consider the following components of an application as fundable:

### **5.1 Employment of Personnel**

Hourly rates of pay will be determined from the relevant Award Rates of pay for administrative and technical support. No funding will be provided for the payment of staff salaries.

### **5.2 Travel**

Contribution towards travel will depend on the nature of the project. In general, funds for travel will only be considered when they form an integral part of the project, i.e. data collection. Mode of travel must be indicated.

### **5.3 Meals and Accommodation**

Claims for meals and accommodation will be approved provided they form an integral part of the project. They will not be allowed in the resident work setting unless special circumstances are present.

### **5.4 Technical Services and Supplies**

#### *5.4.1 Computer Service*

Reasonable expenses for computer services or purchase of software is permitted. Budgets must include the type of facility to be used, rates per hour and number of hours required. Generally the purchase of hardware will not be funded.

#### *5.4.2 Equipment*

In general, funding will not be provided for equipment. However, the purchase of items specifically required for the project may be allowed if such items are normally not available and deemed essential. Any equipment so purchased will remain the property of the institution. Where expensive equipment owned by the institution will be used to carry out the research, maintenance costs pro rata for such equipment may be permitted.

#### *5.4.3 Consumables*

Funds may be provided for laboratory supplies such as films, gases, etc.

### **5.5 University Infrastructure Costs**

University infrastructure costs up to 15% will be permitted.

## 6. BUDGET STRUCTURE

Research projects are classified within the budget according to which organisation or department nominated the research priority and also the domain to which the research is most likely to be applied on completion.

### 6.1 *Game / General Development Projects*

Research projects that will be beneficial for Australian Football across all levels of competition, including grass roots and junior football are classified as Game / General Development projects. An example of a Game / General Development project is: *“Current best practice guidelines for treating concussion in Australian Football.”*

### 6.2 *Research Board Programs*

Projects that are undertaken on an annual basis are classified as Research Board Programs. Examples of Research Board Programs are the AFL Grand Final Symposium and AFL Injury Survey.

### 6.3 *Game / National Competition Projects*

Research projects that will be predominantly beneficial for Australian Football at the elite level (AFL) are classified as Game / National Competition projects. An example of a Game / National Competition project is: *“Modeling the effect of a restriction on the number of interchanges in the AFL”.*

### 6.4 *External Projects*

Specific priority research projects are required by the AFL and often there is a preferred researcher and an existing research proposal. The AFL Research Board performs the role of reviewing the methodology, ensuring appropriate academic / scientific rigour and providing feedback as to how the proposal can be improved. The Research Board may also provide advice on the appropriateness of the final report.

## 7. RESEARCH PRIORITIES / APPLICATION PROCESS

### 7.1 STEP 1 – Submissions on priority research areas

Letters from the AFL Research Board are sent to the following stakeholders requesting submissions on stakeholder priority research areas:

- AFL Club Chief Executives
- AFL Club Football Managers
- AFL Club Fitness Representatives
- AFL Club Fitness Representatives sub-committee
- AFL Coaches Association
- AFL Football Operations Department
- AFL Game Development Department
- AFL Medical Officers Association
- AFL Medical Commissioners
- AFL Northern Territory
- AFL NSW / ACT
- AFL Physiotherapists Association
- AFL Players Association
- AFL Queensland
- AFL Tasmania
- AFL Umpires Association
- AFL Victoria
- Australian Football Coaches Association
- South Australian National Football League (SANFL)
- West Australian Football Commission (WAFC)

A specific research project does not necessarily have to be identified; only priority research areas are sought at this initial stage. The submission should include the main research concept and a brief background on the reasons why that area is a priority for their organisation or department. One full month is allowed for stakeholders to prepare their submissions.

Specific research project applications will also be accepted from the public leading up to the commencement of this process. These projects will be added to the submissions from the stakeholders and listed for the consideration of the AFL Research Board.

## **7.2 STEP 2 – Priority research area short listing**

Research Area submissions are grouped into the following categories and given to the relevant departments to form a short list of 2-3 research priorities:

- AFL Football Operations
- AFL Game Development
- AFL Players Association
- AFL Medical Officers / Medical Commissioners / Physiotherapists

## **7.3 STEP 3 – Selection of priority research areas**

The AFL Research Board determines which short list priorities should be selected for funding (amount determined by the number of ongoing or second stage projects and the amount of money available in the budget).

There is no minimum or maximum number of research priorities. However as a guideline for applicants, over the past 3-4 years there is generally between five and six projects advertised from a total of ten or twelve projects that are in progress over a twelve month period.

## **7.4 STEP 4 – Advertising for research applications**

A detailed outline of the research required is prepared by the AFL Research Board and applications are invited through advertisements on the AFL Website ([www.afl.com.au](http://www.afl.com.au)) and in all major tertiary publications across Australia. Application forms can also be requested through the AFL Research Board Secretary Shane McCurry, [shane.mccurry@afl.com.au](mailto:shane.mccurry@afl.com.au).

The advertisements seek specific detailed research proposals for projects that are associated with each of the selected research priorities.

All applications must include the information requested in accordance with the application form, including the purpose of the study, methods, budget summary, time line, written support of an AFL Club / peak football body and final approval from the institution's Ethics Committee.

Between four and six weeks is allowed for the preparation of applications.

Researchers with a demonstrated interest, expertise and/or proven track record with one of the priority topics may be invited by the AFL Research Board to submit a proposal as an alternative to advertising for the project.

The AFL Research Board reserves the right to commission research when it is clear that a researcher or research consortium has a proven academic / research record in the area of research priority.

## **7.5 STEP 5 – Selection of successful applications**

### *7.5.1 Preliminary Review*

The AFL Research Board will conduct a preliminary review of all applications to determine those which fall within the guidelines and which will provide significant practical benefits for Australian football.

### *7.5.2 Scientific Review*

An assessment sub-committee will be formed for each proposal consisting of members from the AFL Research Board and sometimes a representative from the AFL club or peak body who are supporting the project. External assessment can also be used where required. They assess the applications according to the following criteria:

- demonstrated depth of insight into the problem
- scientific merit, design and methodology of the project
- feasibility of the study
- appropriateness of the budget
- potential of the research results to be readily applied
- degree of support from the AFL club / peak body

The AFL Research Board is able to make recommendations for changes to the content or structure of the research, along with the funding to be allocated. If the researcher agrees to make the suggested changes, the project is formally approved for commencement at the agreed time (usually the start of the following calendar year).

## **7.6 STEP 6 – Recommendations**

The recommendations of the assessment sub-committee will be reviewed by the AFL Research Board prior to submission to the AFL General Manager Football Operations for final approval. Final recommendations will be based upon:

- the direct benefit to Australian football
- the scientific review
- the degree of support from the AFL Club / peak football body
- the available budget

## **7.7 STEP 7 – Post decision process**

### *7.7.1 Notification*

Once the AFL General Manager Football Operations has approved funding, applicants will be notified of decisions regarding funding by the secretary of the AFL Research Board. This usually occurs towards the end of the calendar year. All unsuccessful applicants will also be notified in writing.

### *7.7.2 Contract*

A contract (in the form of a standard research agreement) will be executed between the AFL, principal researcher and the administering institution. The contract will detail payment structures and all other details relating to the terms and conditions of the agreement to be entered into between the parties.

## 8. APPLICATION AND SELECTION TIMELINE

*N.B. Timeline subject to change on annual basis*

### ***November – December***

Research projects from current year submitted and finalised.

### ***March – April***

Submissions invited on priority research areas for the following year.

### ***June – July***

Research priorities are selected and Projects advertised.

### ***August – September***

Applications critiqued and successful projects chosen.

### ***January***

New projects commence.

## **9. REQUIREMENTS OF SUPPORTING BODY**

Upon approval of a project the relevant AFL Club / peak football body should assist the researcher by:

- Ensuring relevant personnel are available to provide on site assistance and background material where appropriate.
- Assisting the researcher to access the appropriate number of subjects if applicable.
- Providing feedback at the request of the AFL on how they perceive the research to be progressing.

## 10. ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES

At regular intervals (usually 2-3 months) during the course of the project, the researcher will be required to submit progress reports for the information of the AFL Research Board. These requests will be made via the secretary of the AFL Research Board.

On or before the specified completion date of the research project, the researcher must submit the following:

- Draft final report.
- Draft lay summary of the final report that can be used to assist with disseminating the research to AFL clubs and the general public.

*Lay summary should be no longer than 3 pages, including relevant background, brief overview of methodology, and a summary of results and any conclusions or recommendations. Academic language should be avoided in the lay summary.*

- An outline of the plan for publication and a list of any presentations that will occur using the research content. Such publications and presentations are not permitted without AFL approval.

The AFL Research Board will review all of the above documents and make recommendations (if necessary) for any amendments that need to be made. The modified documents will then be resubmitted to the AFL Research Board and supporting body for final approval before they are accepted.

## **11. FINAL ACCEPTANCE**

Final acceptance will be communicated to the researcher in the form of a letter from the Secretary or Chairman of the AFL Research Board. Final acceptance of the project will be determined by:

- Acceptance of draft final report and lay summary by the AFL Research Board
- Acceptance of draft final report and lay summary by the AFL Club or Peak football body who supported the project

### ***11.1 Distribution of research***

The researcher may be requested to assist with the release of the research to the media and the general public. Some research projects are disseminated via a formal press conference and media release, depending on the success of the project and the level of interest to the football industry.

The majority of projects are distributed via email to the AFL clubs and peak football bodies as soon as they are accepted.

## **12. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC**

### ***12.1 Publication prior to completion of project***

No work can be submitted for publication in any form and no comment can be made in the media or public prior to the completion of the research project without AFL Research Board approval. Requests for permission to publish or disclose information must be directed to the Secretary of the AFL Research Board who will provide written advice regarding whether or not permission is granted. Such requests will generally be approved unless there is a legitimate reason why the research cannot be released.

### ***12.2 Publication after final acceptance of project***

Any work to be submitted for publication in any form and any comment to be made in the media or public after the completion of the research project must also have AFL Research Board approval. Requests for permission to publish or disclose information must be directed to the Secretary of the AFL Research Board who will provide written advice regarding whether or not permission is granted. This measure is a requirement in accordance with the media and communications policy of the AFL. Such requests will generally be supported unless there is a legitimate reason why the research cannot be released.

### 13. TERMS OF REFERENCE

**The Australian Football League (“AFL”) is the governing body of the sport, “Australian Football”.**

All references made to the governing body of the Sport are to be listed as “AFL”.

All references made to the sport itself are to be listed as “Australian Football”. References to the sport as AFL, AFL game, Australian Rules Football, Football, Aussie Rules, etc are not acceptable.

All references to sub elite competitions should include the specific league being referred to, i.e. VFL, SANFL, WAFL, TAC Cup, etc.

Where these sub elite competitions are referred to as a collective the term “second tier competitions” should be used.

Where competitions or leagues below the sub elite level are being referred to as a collective the term “grass roots competitions” or “grass roots football” should be used.

Where the individual level of grass roots competition is relevant in the context, clarity should be provided regarding the specific level being referred to, i.e. gender, age group, league, district, etc.

## **14. CONCLUSION**

The AFL was the first sporting body in Australia to implement a funded research board and by doing so has distinguished itself as the most progressive professional sport in this country with regard to injury and sport-related research.

The AFL is a World leader with research initiatives such as the AFL injury survey (World's longest running publicly-released sports injury surveillance system), and the AFL Grand Final Symposium (a foundation for generating research concepts in areas of critical interest to the sport).

The AFL Research Program is an important strategic initiative for continuing to enhance and develop the game.

The AFL Research Board encourages all applicants to provide dynamic and innovative research proposals that will make a direct contribution to Australian Football across all levels of competition.