



Government of South Australia

Department of State Development

20 26 | SA Science Excellence + Innovation Awards

Application Guidelines

Enquiries

Department of State Development
Email: DSDCommunications@sa.gov.au

www.scienceawards.sa.gov.au

The South Australian Government invites applications for the 2026 South Australian Science Excellence and Innovation Awards.

These annual awards recognise South Australian individuals and teams that have demonstrated outstanding leadership, innovation and scientific contributions to the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (**STEMM**).

Applications from individuals and teams with diverse backgrounds across South Australia are welcomed.

The objectives of the South Australian Science Excellence and Innovation Awards are to:

- celebrate the importance of excellence, collaboration, innovation and translation of work across STEMM fields for a healthy economy, environment and community;
- recognise outstanding achievements by individuals and teams in STEMM research, innovation and education;
- highlight the critical role that South Australia's STEMM leaders across research, industry, and education are playing in a changing world to deliver solutions for health, environmental, and economic challenges of the future; and
- showcase the importance and diversity of STEMM professionals and careers for the current and future workforce.
- recognise the contribution of Indigenous Knowledge Systems to STEMM research, innovation, education, and their transformative impact on communities and the broader society.

Stay connected on all things science

X: [@sachiefsci](#) [#SAScienceAwards](#)

in LinkedIn: [Chief Scientist for South Australia](#)



**Professor
Kishan Dholakia**

2025 South Australian Scientist of the Year

WINNER



**Professor
Craig Simmons**

Chief Scientist for South Australia

The SA Science Excellence and Innovation Awards are about showcasing the outstanding achievements of pioneering South Australian STEMM professionals, whose relentless pursuit of innovation are having profound social, economic, health and environmental impacts.

2026 Award Categories

There are seven award categories:

South Australian Scientist of the Year *(open to individuals)*

South Australian Mid-Career STEM Professional *(open to individuals)*

STEMM Educator of the Year *(open to individuals and teams)*

- **Primary or Secondary School**
- **University or Registered Training Organisation**

Excellence in Collaborative Innovation *(open to teams)*

PhD Research Excellence *(open to individuals)*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEM Award *(open to individuals and teams)*

Awards

Award recipients are publicly recognised and celebrated for their achievements. Each recipient or team receives a trophy designed by a local artist and a monetary award with a total value of:

- \$25,000 for the South Australian Scientist of the Year; and
- \$10,000 each for the South Australian Mid-Career STEM Professional, STEMM Educator of the Year (two prizes), Excellence in Collaborative Innovation, PhD Research Excellence Award, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEM Award.

The monetary award for a team will usually be shared equally by all team members except for in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis.

Recipients are expected to use award money for their work-related activities. This may include support for professional development activities related to growing leadership, management, or business skills, conference support including travel, support for publication outputs, and work-related expenses e.g. childcare, collaboration or innovation related expenses.

Individuals or Teams may apply to the Department directly through the [Science Awards website](#).



Dr Hayden Tronnolone

2025 STEM Educator of the Year

University or Registered Training Organisation

WINNER

How to Apply

- Review the eligibility criteria;
- Ensure you are applying in the correct category;
- Read and agree to the conditions of entry;
- Complete the online form addressing each selection criterion;
- Provide a copy of your curriculum vitae (CV) (where the application is for a team award, CVs for each member of the team are required) – each CV should be abbreviated to no more than four (4) pages. Applications providing CVs longer than 4 pages will not be considered for selection;
- A maximum of five (5) members may be included for a team award, regardless of the actual size of the team;
- Provide the specified written endorsement for your individual application or in the case of a team application, a written endorsement for each member of the team. Without the appropriate written endorsements, the application will not be considered for selection;
- **Applications from staff or students from:**
 - **universities** must be endorsed by their Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (DVCR) or Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic (DVCA)
 - **registered training organisation** must be endorsed by their Education Manager; and
 - **schools** must be endorsed by their school Principal.
- **Applications from industry** must be endorsed by their employer through its chief executive officer or company chairperson. In the case of a chief executive officer or company chairperson applying, they may endorse their own application;
- Applications from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples must include a letter of community endorsement from a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation or Indigenous community leader;
- Provide an optional Relative Opportunity Statement to detail any career interruptions or breaks (for individual applications only);
- Complete a survey for statistical purposes; and
- Any application that does not include all the information as outlined above will not be considered for selection.

Endorsing an application

If you are endorsing an application for the 2026 SA Science Excellence and Innovation Awards, you must endorse that:

- the applicant is an Australian citizen or permanent resident;
- to your knowledge, the applicant has not been found to have committed, formally convicted of, or is currently under a formal investigation for, any misconduct, academic misconduct or criminal offences;
- the application is based on the individual's achievement to date;
- the majority of the applicant's work as described in their application was undertaken in South Australia; and
- for Mid-Career STEMM Professionals, that the applicant's combined work experience in R&I roles is no less than eight (8) years and no more than fifteen (15) years, unless legitimate career interruptions have been cited in a Relative Opportunity Statement.
- for PhD Students, that the student has received conferral of their PhD degree and that this occurred no more than twenty four (24) months prior to the closure of the applications for the awards.

Relative Opportunity Statement:

Applicants may wish to provide a 'Relative Opportunity Statement' that details legitimate career interruptions. This statement will be used to assess an applicant's relative opportunity to demonstrate excellence. Career interruptions may include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Childbirth / Parental leave;
- Carers' responsibilities;
- Extended health leave; and
- Unemployment.

Selection process

- The Department of State Development manages and administers the selection process for the 2026 South Australian Science Excellence and Innovation Awards.

- Applications will be reviewed by independent selection panels (Panel). Assessment will be based solely on the written information provided in the application form and Relative Opportunity Statement (if provided).
- Each applicant will be assessed by the Panel against the selection criteria to determine the award recipient (winner) and short-listed finalists (finalists) for each award category.
- During the selection process, applicants should note that the employer, colleagues, endorsers or associates of finalists may be contacted to confirm relevant details within an application where appropriate.
- Finalists may also be required to participate in an interview, the availability of which will be at the discretion of the Panel and not as a right. The Department and the Panel have unfettered discretion with respect to the assessment of applications and manner, timing or mode of any such assessments. The decision of the Panel is final.

Award presentation

- The 2026 South Australian Science Excellence and Innovation Awards presentation will be held in November 2026.
- Individual finalists will receive a maximum of two complimentary tickets to the presentation; team finalists will receive a maximum of five (5) complimentary tickets, at the discretion of the Department.
- It is a requirement that all finalists or their representatives attend the presentation event and be available for promotional opportunities leading up to and following the award presentation.



Conditions of entry

By entering the 2026 SA Science Excellence and Innovation Awards, you agree to abide by the following conditions of entry:

- Closing date for entries is 5pm ACST Monday 27 April 2026. No extensions will be provided and applications lodged after this deadline will not be considered by the Department or Panel.
- Applicants consent to the Department collecting and using personal information (including sensitive information) obtained through the application process for the purpose of the application assessment, awards and other incidental purposes including, but not limited to, contacting employers, endorsers or associates to verify the contents of applications made to the Department;
- Applicants must be eligible for entry according to both the general eligibility criteria and specific award category criteria. Non-compliance with any entry criteria will be sufficient grounds for rejection of the application or revocation of any awards which would otherwise be awarded in accordance with the award revocation policy;
- Applications must include all the information listed under the 'Apply' section above. Any application not in compliance with these conditions of entry or the above information or requirements will not be considered for selection;
- Applicants enter on the understanding that the Department or its nominee reserves the right to alter, vary and/or modify any prize or condition of entry and reserves the right to make any new conditions including for the eligibility of applicants or awards at any time and their sole discretion;
- The Department reserves the right to revoke an award in its sole discretion and on whatever grounds it deems appropriate;
- The Department reserves the right to use, and applicants consent to that use of, nonconfidential details, photographs and/or film footage for any publicity purpose pertaining to promoting the South Australian Science Excellence and Innovation Awards as important contributors to South Australia's economic, social and environmental wellbeing;
- Written digital material submitted as part of the application process may be used by the Department for media releases or case studies;
- Award recipients and finalists may be asked to undertake a number of local public events and engagements in the year following their award, such as National Science Week, or to present addresses at official events;
- Applicants must abide by the decisions of the Department or its nominee, whose decision shall be final on all matters pertaining to the awards without right of review or appeal. The Department and its nominee(s) have unfettered discretion as to any decisions regarding the awards, eligibility criteria and/or the timing, type or mode of any such decisions. No reasons, correspondence or justification for any decision shall be required of the Department; and
- Applicants acknowledge and agree that the Department may, in its discretion and from time to time during the application process, undertake due diligence in respect of Applicants including the contents of any application, Relative Opportunity Statement or other material submitted to the Department.

General Eligibility Criteria

For each category, there are specific eligibility criteria which applicants must meet in order for their applications (whether individuals or teams) to be considered. In addition to these requirements, the following general eligibility criteria must be met:

- Applicants must be Australian citizens or hold permanent resident status;
- Applicants must not have been found to have committed, formally convicted of, or is currently under a formal investigation for, any misconduct, academic misconduct or criminal offences;
- Applicants must not be bankrupt or the subject of a personal insolvency agreement with which they have failed to comply;
- Applicants must not be disqualified from holding office as a director or any position by a professional body or regulator;
- Applicants must not conduct themselves in a manner which disparages or brings, as the case may be, the awards, Department, Panel or responsible Minister(s) (or their offices, employees or agents including any public sector employees) into disrepute or invites any of them to behave unethically, prefer private interests over the public interest or otherwise contravene the Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector;
- Applicants who are past award recipients (winners) cannot apply in the same or similar category, but may apply for other categories if they are eligible; and
- previous Applicants and finalists are eligible to reapply in any award category for which they are otherwise eligible.

Activated OSHC Partnership: Transforming after-school health at scale



2025 Excellence in Collaborative Innovation

WINNER



South Australian Scientist of the Year

Awarded to an individual who has demonstrated excellence in any STEMM field. The Scientist of the Year will also have made an outstanding contribution in providing leadership that has inspired others.

Eligibility

- Individuals from across academia, industry and government sectors are eligible to apply;
- Applications must be based on achievement to date; and
- The majority of the Applicant's work or research in the last five (5) years should have been undertaken in South Australia.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

Significant international contributions made in their field, providing evidence of the recognition of the global impact of their research by peers and stakeholders.

Criteria 2

Demonstrated track record of excellence as a leader within or beyond their field of research. This may include examples of:

- building, leading and mentoring successful teams;
- leading successful collaborations either across disciplinary fields, engagement with industry, other public organisations or end users of research; and
- contributions to activities which shape the future of individuals or communities, or the future directions of their field.

Criteria 3

In addition to the above, any other evidence of the benefits (e.g. environmental, social, health and economic) of the translation of research to South Australia from their activities.

South Australian Mid-Career STEM Professional

Awarded to an individual at the mid-career level who has demonstrated research and innovation excellence in any STEM field from any sector (industry, government, academia). The South Australian Mid-Career STEM Professional demonstrates capabilities in leadership and collaboration, and translational outcomes from their work.

Eligibility

- Individuals from academia, industry and government sectors are eligible to apply;
- Applicants must have between 8-15 years of work experience in R&I focussed roles. Recognised career interruptions may be cited, See Relative Opportunity Statement for further information;
- The applicant must not be undertaking a formal qualification at the time of applying (e.g. PhD or Masters); and
- The majority of the applicants work or research in the last three (3) years must have been undertaken in South Australia and the applicant should currently hold a role that is based in South Australia.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

Significant contributions made in their field of research or sector. Provide evidence of the scope and impact of their contribution, and recognition from peers, stakeholders, and the community.

Criteria 2

Evidence of leadership and collaboration.

- Examples of leading successful research & innovation teams or projects; or
- Examples of mentoring and training early-career employees; or
- Examples of successful collaborations either across disciplinary fields, cross-sectoral engagement (academia, industry, government), other organisations, or end users.

Criteria 3

In addition to the above, evidence of positive impact or translation of the research & innovation activities and outputs, within industry, government, or the community (local, national, or global).

Australian Science and Mathematics School Interdisciplinary STEMM Team

2025 STEMM Educator of the Year

Primary or Secondary School

WINNER



STEMM Educator of the Year

The STEMM Educator of the Year Award recognises educators who have made an outstanding contribution to STEMM education. Part time educators are eligible.

The STEMM Educator of the Year is awarded in the following sub-categories:

- Primary or Secondary School Level
- University or Registered Training Organisation

STEMM Educator of the Year – Primary or Secondary School Level

The STEMM Educator of the Year – Primary or Secondary School Level is open to applications from an individual teacher or from a teacher and their team from the education sector (early childhood, primary or secondary, public and private sectors) who have made an outstanding contribution to enhancing student learning and have inspired their students to engage actively in STEMM.

Eligibility

- Individuals or teams of up to five members from either the private or public sectors are eligible to apply;
- Applications are to be endorsed by the school Principal; and
- All applicants should be active in teaching STEMM subjects in the classroom in South Australia at the time of their application.

Note: As part of the judging process, the following criteria will be adapted to take into consideration the age of the applicant's students and their learning needs.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

An innovative and imaginative approach to teaching STEMM that motivates students to learn.

Criteria 2

Active involvement in STEMM education through teaching that reflects a command of the field and is evidenced by high standing in the professional community.

Criteria 3

Demonstrated ability to develop students' confidence in learning, and use and apply STEMM knowledge and processes.

STEMM Educator of the Year (continued)

STEMM Educator of the Year – University or Registered Training Organisation

The STEMM Educator of the Year – University or Registered Training Organisation Award is open to individuals and teams who have made an outstanding contribution to enhancing student learning in STEMM areas.

The award winner will have inspired their students to become involved in student-centred investigation in STEMM areas, where students seek answers to scientific questions posed by themselves and set in real-world contexts.

Eligibility

- Individuals or teams of up to five members are eligible to apply;
- Applications are to be endorsed by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic (university) or Education Manager (registered training organisation); and
- All applicants must be active in teaching STEMM subjects in South Australia at the time of their application.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

An innovative and imaginative approach to teaching STEMM that motivates students to learn. Contribution to activities that have promoted an understanding of STEMM and influenced and enhanced learning and teaching.

Criteria 2

Active involvement in STEMM education through teaching that reflects a command of the field and is evidenced by high standing in the professional community.

Criteria 3

Demonstrated impact on students. This could be evidenced through:

- increased enrolments in subject areas;
- number of graduates proceeding to STEMM related careers;
- recognition from a professional body; or
- other measurable outcomes.



Excellence in Collaborative Innovation

This award recognises teams currently working in South Australia, who have successfully collaborated across sectors to develop new-to-world, new-to-Australia, or new-to-industry products, processes or services through research and innovation. The award recognises innovation achieved through collaboration that has driven changes to established practices, resulting in positive economic, social, or environmental outcomes.

Eligibility

- Teams of up to five (5) members are eligible to apply. All individuals must meet the Conditions of Entry eligibility criteria;
- The partnership should endeavour to include individuals from (but is not limited to) academia, industry, government, or other relevant organisations;
- Most of the research and collaboration activities for which the application is covering should have been undertaken in South Australia; and
- There is no fixed limitation on the length of time that has elapsed before the impact of the collaboration has been realised.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

Outline a summary of the collaborative research and innovation project, including:

- The challenge being addressed, outlining the local, national, or global scale;
- How the collaborative partnership was initiated; and
- The essential capabilities that each team member brings to the collaboration

Criteria 2

Evidence of excellence in collaboration, research, and innovation to address the identified challenge.

- How has the team worked together to overcome challenges and deliver excellent outcomes; and
- Evidence of new-to-world, new-to-Australia, or new-to-industry innovation (e.g. patents, publications, changed industry practice)

Criteria 3

Evidence and impact of translation, or demonstration of the pathway to translation. Outline how the collaborative partnership has generated or has the potential to generate significant economic, social, health, or environmental benefits to South Australia, nationally, or globally.



Dr Marie-Claire Seeley

2025 PhD Research Excellence

WINNER

PhD Research Excellence Award

This award recognises recent PhD graduates who have demonstrated outstanding research achievement in any STEM field. Applicants are encouraged to discuss the potential longer-term impact of their work within and beyond their field.

Eligibility

- Applicants must have had their PhD conferred by a South Australian higher education provider;
- Applicants must have received their conferral of a PhD degree and in a time period that is no more than twenty four (24) months prior to the closure of applications for these awards; and
- Applicants must include a statement of support from their primary supervisor or co-supervisor.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

Evidence of research excellence during the completion of a PhD. This may include, but is not limited to:

- the quality of research publications or conference papers as appropriate; or
- awards, honours and recognition by peers, external bodies, community, etc.

Criteria 2

Evidence of research engagement and collaboration. This may include an explanation of:

- the approach taken to initiate engagement with potential research partners; and
- the level of involvement of partners outside research in a collaborative venture.

Criteria 3

In addition to the above, any other evidence of recognition of leadership contributions and potential career success. This may include:

- demonstration and/or recognition of leadership attributes within or outside the field of research during the PhD; and
- indicators of career progression.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STEMM Award

This award celebrates outstanding contributions by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or teams led by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The award recognises those who have significantly improved the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or communities through innovative research or initiatives.

The award is also open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who can show integration of Indigenous knowledge with STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine) practices, resulting in transformative impacts on economic, social, environmental, cultural or health outcomes. Such projects may include, but are not limited to, advancements in sustainable practices, health interventions, educational programs, and technological innovations that draw on the rich heritage and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Eligibility

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or teams of up to five (5) members led by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples are eligible to apply.
- Applications must include a letter of community endorsement from a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation or Indigenous community leader, demonstrating the impact of their work.
- The majority of the research and collaboration activities should have been undertaken in South Australia or in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities connected to South Australia.
- There is no fixed limitation on the length of time that has elapsed since the impact of the collaboration has been realised.

Selection criteria

Criteria 1

Demonstrated contributions that have benefited South Australian people or community, or to incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge with STEMM practices. Applicants should provide evidence of the scope, depth, and impact of their work, including recognition from peers, stakeholders, and community members. Testimonials or endorsements from those directly impacted are encouraged.

Criteria 2

Evidence of leadership and collaboration within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, underpinned by any of the below key principles to ensure integrity and impact.

Key Principles:

- **Community-Driven Leadership**
Demonstrate leadership in research and innovation by building and guiding successful teams or projects that mentor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Prioritise initiatives that are shaped by, and endorsed by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—ensuring relevance, acceptability, and accountability.
- **Inclusive and Cross-Cultural Collaboration**
Lead effective collaborations across disciplines and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensuring Indigenous Peoples and organisations are actively involved in all stages of research—design, implementation, and translation.

- **Respectful and Equitable Partnerships**

Foster partnerships grounded in mutual trust, respect, and cultural competence. Work respectfully across cultures, recognising and upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and the custodianship of that knowledge.

- **Culturally Responsive Impact**

Contribute to initiatives that shape the future of individuals or communities through culturally relevant communication, active listening, and learning. Ensure research delivers tangible, community-defined benefits, with attention to both outcomes and processes.

- **Protection of Indigenous Intellectual Property**

Acknowledge and protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property rights. Ensure transparent negotiation, culturally appropriate management of research materials, and fair benefit-sharing practices.

- **Knowledge Sharing and Translation**

Commit to the integration and sharing of knowledge throughout all phases of the research process. Promote knowledge translation that maximises impact on policy, practice, and community outcomes.

Criteria 3

Additional evidence of the broader benefits of the applicant's work, including environmental, social, health, cultural, or economic outcomes, particularly as they relate to South Australia.

20 | SA Science 26 | Excellence+ Innovation Awards

Stay connected on all things science

X: @sachiefsci #SAScienceAwards

in LinkedIn: Chief Scientist for South Australia



Government
of South Australia

Department of
State Development