

Guidance Note: Advocacy and Research Projects

Energy Consumers Australia funds both advocacy and research projects within its Grants Program. We have published this Guidance Note to assist applicants in better meeting the requirements of the Grants Program.

All projects must be eligible

Energy Consumers Australia requires all applications for funding within the Grants Program to meet the same **eligibility criteria**. This means that all applications for advocacy and research projects need to demonstrate that they will:

Build knowledge and/or sectoral capacity supporting policy development and consumer education in the National Energy Market.

All projects must support advocacy

Through its Grants Program, Energy Consumers Australia supports strong, co-ordinated, collegiate and evidence-based advocacy for the benefit of residential and small business energy consumers. Energy Consumers Australia has defined energy advocacy as:

An activity designed to influence or create change that improves the long-term interests of electricity and gas consumers.¹

Advocacy can also be described as a set of actions that lead to realising a goal. Put another way, it can be working to put a problem on the agenda of decision-makers, identify a solution to that problem and **build support for action** on the problem and the solution.

Advocacy can involve working with peers, allies and coalitions. It can be undertaken by a range of organisations and stakeholders. In energy markets in Australia, there are groups and individuals who have a core focus on undertaking advocacy for residential and small business energy consumers. However, there are other voices involved in energy advocacy and Energy Consumers Australia welcomes grant applications from others who can contribute to this advocacy.

An important consideration for all grant applications - both advocacy and research projects to support advocacy - is how these projects intend to **achieve impact or influence**.

Requirements for advocacy projects

Advocacy projects need to show:

- What is the problem you are trying to address?;
- Why is this critical for the long-term interests of consumers?;
- Who is the project aimed at influencing? Why now?;
- What actions will you take to address the problem and create influence? Why those actions?;

¹ Energy Consumers Australia, *Grants Review Issues Paper*, September 2015 ([link](#))

- How you will engage with other advocates;
- Why you are best placed or have the capability to undertake the project and achieve impact;
- What will be the measurable impact of your project? Who will benefit?; and
- Will there be wider benefits?

Requirements for research projects

Research has been defined by the Department of Education and Training as:

The creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings.²

For the Grants Program, research projects are more likely to be future-focused and address longer-term or emerging consumer issues. They are required to inform and support future advocacy by providing advocates and other stakeholders with **a robust, topical and well-informed evidence base**.

Research projects can contribute to the building of evidence and knowledge through empirical research or through non-empirical research. Energy Consumers Australia expects applicants for research projects to identify existing foundational or relevant research on which they intend to rely, or to build upon.

Where empirical research is part of a project it will be essential that the methodologies are robust. Social research should use ethical frameworks such as the professional and quality standards of the Australian Market and Social Research Society.

Research projects need to show:

- What is the problem you are trying to address?;
- Why is this critical for the long-term interests of consumers?;
- Who is the project aimed at influencing? Why now?;
- What actions will you take to address the problem and create influence? Why those actions?;
- How you will engage with advocates;
- Why you are best placed or have the capability to undertake the project and achieve impact;
- What will be the measurable impact of your project? Who will benefit?; and
- Will there be wider benefits?

Applicants for research project grants can include organisations or individuals who are not advocates.

Successful grant projects

Energy Consumers Australia considers that successful projects, both advocacy and research projects, will be successful if they:

- address a clearly defined, topical issue for residential and small business energy consumers;
- are aimed at effective advocacy or supporting such advocacy;
- have an effective approach for having influence or achieving change or a robust methodology for research; and
- show how they intend to create impact or influence.

² Western Sydney University, 2018 ([link](#))²