2026 NATIONAL RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ROADMAP ISSUES PAPER: CONSULTATION SURVEY

Submission to the 2026 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap Issues Paper Consultation Survey

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together the multidisciplinary expertise of our nation's leading thinkers to provide practical, evidence-based advice on important social issues facing society.

As the pre-eminent organisation in Australia representing excellence across the social science disciplines, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the 2026 National Research Infrastructure (NRI) Roadmap Issues Paper Consultation Survey.

To discuss any matters raised in our survey response, please contact Andrea Verdich, Policy Director on 0438 218 352, or andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au.

Defining the National Research Infrastructure

It is proposed that in the 2026 NRI Roadmap the definition of NRI is updated to:

NRI comprises the nationally significant assets, facilities and highly-skilled personnel providing services that together support leading-edge research and innovation. It is accessible to publicly and privately funded users across Australia and internationally and may be single-sited, virtual or distributed.

Q1. Should the proposed definition of NRI in the 2026 NRI Roadmap be modified – such as by elaborating what is meant by 'nationally significant', or by other changes?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia supports the updated definition of NRI, particularly the emphasis on highly skilled personnel and distributed infrastructures. However, we recommend elaborating "nationally significant" to explicitly include infrastructures that enable equitable access, that embed where relevant Indigenous Data Governance principles, and that enable interdisciplinary collaboration by design. This would ensure that NRI encompasses both technical assets and governance frameworks that safeguard culturally sensitive data, promote diversity, and deliver broad societal benefit.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems

Q2. What should be done, and over what timeframe, to ensure future NRI investments respect cultural protocols, and support self-determination and promote benefit sharing, in line with the Australian Government's [Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data](#)?

Future NRI investments must embed Indigenous Data Governance (IDG), Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS), and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles from the outset. Building on initiatives such as the Improving Indigenous Research Capabilities project and the Language Data Commons of Australia, a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Data Commons should be established as a discrete capability within the next 3-5 years. This capability should be co-designed with Indigenous communities, ensuring CARE principles (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics) are operationalised. Long-term

investment should also support Indigenous-led governance structures, workforce development, and integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into national research priorities.

Q3. How might an appropriate balance be achieved between investment in a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Research Data Commons capability, and provision of uplift in capability across relevant discipline and theme-oriented NRI?

A dual-track approach is required. On the one hand, a dedicated Indigenous Data Commons is required to provide secure, Indigenous-governed repositories and tools. On the other, discipline- or sector-oriented NRI capabilities must be supported where relevant to embed Indigenous research and data protocols across their operations. Alignment can be achieved through national standards, shared metadata frameworks, and incentives for collaboration across providers. This will ensure Indigenous knowledge systems are both protected and integrated into broader infrastructures, enabling cross-disciplinary research while maintaining community control.

Humanities

Q4. What are the current top 3 priorities for NRI investment for the humanities?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia is primarily concerned with social science research infrastructure, as outlined in its Decadal Plan 2024-33. However, there are significant overlaps between humanities and social science research methodologies and data sources; particularly in fields and disciplines such as history, anthropology and sociology. From this perspective, the top 3 priorities for NRI investment in the humanities from the perspective of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia are:

- Integration and digitisation of civic and cultural collections (libraries, archives, museums)
- Development of advanced digital observatories for social and cultural data
- Secure, FAIR-compliant platforms for humanities data sharing and reuse.

Q5. What new or emerging areas of humanities research will require NRI investment in the next 3-5 years?

From the perspective of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, emerging areas of research that will require dedicated NRI investment over the medium term include:

- Digital societies and online cultural ecosystems
- AI-enabled analysis of historical and cultural collections
- Indigenous-led humanities research infrastructures, embedding sovereignty and cultural protocols.

Q6. Should Australia focus on developing a specialist humanities research infrastructure workforce or a generalist research infrastructure workforce with humanities domain expertise and ability to bridge across disciplines?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia recommends a generalist workforce with humanities domain expertise.

The pros if this approach include the capacity to establish bridges across disciplines, support interdisciplinary collaboration, and increase the sustainability of NRI investments.

The cons of a specialist-oriented strategy include the risks of siloing and limited integration with broader NRI capabilities.

Research infrastructure workforce

Q7. What are the critical skills that the NRI workforce should have regardless of their technical expertise?

- Digital literacy and advanced data analytics

- Ethical governance of human and culturally sensitive data

- Sound understanding of Indigenous-led data stewardship and cultural competency

- Collaboration and stakeholder engagement skills.

Q8. What is the best approach to retain staff and add to new capabilities to the current NRI workforce?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia recommends the following high-level approaches:

- Establish clear career pathways and recognition for infrastructure professionals

- Provide ongoing training and upskilling in emerging technologies

- Support Indigenous workforce leadership

- Ensure sustainable funding streams to retain expertise.

Translation and industry

Q9. How can NRI facilities ensure their capabilities are made widely known and available to potential users in relevant industry sectors across Australia's cities and regions?

In the context of socials science NRI, relevant industry sectors include:

- Government (Federal and State/Territory)

- Think tanks and non-university research institutes

- Not-for-profit organisations working in social welfare and social policy

- Private-sector research organisations such as consultants and industry bodies.

While some of the organisations operating in these sectors will already be aware of the relevant NRI capabilities (currently those hosted by ARDC, AURIN and PHRN), many others will not.

Looking ahead, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia recommends the establishment of an overarching social science research infrastructure capability, such as the AIRESS model presented in the Decadal Plan, as an important facilitator and broker of new linkages between new and existing NRI and organisations in these industry sectors.

Q10. How can NRI facilities build the know-how and support that will lead to an increase in productive research-industry collaborations?

Fundamentally, NRI facilities require dedicated resources to invest in collaborations through dedicated programs and staff resources, as well as capacity building within their own organisations.

Some of the approaches that have been shown to be successful include:

- Appointment of dedicated partnership managers and knowledge brokers, with experience in relevant research and industry sectors

- Ongoing on one-off co-design hubs or programs that link researchers, industry and government

- Incentives at state/territory or federal government level for shared infrastructure use in joint projects.

Q11. To improve research translation capability, can you identify and briefly describe needed enhancements of existing NRIs, and/or new NRI?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia recommends the following enhancements.

- Improved integration of longitudinal and administrative data assets through existing national PLIDA and BLADE infrastructure. This integration should priorities state and territory data and NFP data

- Expansion of secure facilities for handling sensitive social and cultural data

- Enhanced interoperability between ARDC-supported infrastructures and social science platforms.

Q12. How should research translation be planned for in the development of new NRI?

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia recommends the following approaches be embedded from the outset in the development of new NRI.

- Embed translation pathways from design stage, including industry and community co-design

- Establish governance frameworks that prioritise practical application of research

- Allocate funding streams for translation activities (including promotion and partnerships) alongside infrastructure development and operations.

New research infrastructure

Q13. Review the full set of available suggestions for potential new or enhanced capabilities from the published Survey responses (Question 35) and identify up to 3 that you regard as most important to consider for inclusion in the 2026 NRI Roadmap. Please provide a brief rationale for your view and include the response number(s) for your selection. Please include the ID and name.

- Capability: [189] ARIESS – Australian Research Infrastructure Ecosystem for the Social Sciences: Coordinated ecosystem connecting 800+ capabilities.

- Capability 2: [255] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Data Commons (ATSIRDC): Dedicated, culturally governed infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data.

- Capability 3: [208] Continued investment in integrated data: discoverability, access and usability.