



Australian Centre
for International
Agricultural Research



Future thinkers' awards: guidelines and selection criteria for 2023

About the initiative

The Future Thinkers' initiative is part of the Pacific Agriculture Scholarships Support and Climate Resilience Program (PASS-CR), funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). The aim of the initiative is to provide PASS-CR scholars and their academic supervisors with tools and knowledge for the effective integration of climate change considerations into agricultural research. While the majority of PASS-CR scholars are conducting research in more traditional areas in agriculture (for example, aquaculture, soil and water management, crop protection) there is a need and opportunity– and for higher-degree-by-research (HDR) students in the Pacific more generally – to expand the scope and impact of their research by integrating new climate change knowledge and tools. This evolution and enrichment of the way that agricultural research is conducted is potentially transformative, catalysing a vital change in the Pacific region's agricultural innovation system. However, if this is to happen, the supervisors of HDR students themselves need to gain a deeper understanding of climate change science and methods as these relate to their own areas of research and teaching and translate this understanding into new ways of working.

The intent of the initiative is to prepare Pacific Island researchers to be able to conduct interdisciplinary research in climate change, that effectively utilizes and integrates concepts and methods developed in the fields of resilience thinking, climate change adaptation, greenhouse gas mitigation and disaster risk reduction. Offering PASS-CR scholars and their supervisors co-learning opportunities in these areas, enriches the thesis research of the students, but at the same time developing the climate science-related skills of supervisors, to propagate these benefits through their work with future generations of HDR students.

The current suite of activities under the Future Thinkers initiative seeks to increase the skills and knowledge of participants on methodologies such as adaptation pathways, participatory scenario planning and integration of climate change into policy and planning, so that their future research has the potential to directly influence planning and decision-making at different governance levels

(community, sector, national, and regional). The first iteration of the Future Thinkers initiative in 2022 supported three PASS-CR scholars allowing them to integrate climate change-related concepts and methods into their thesis research. The next, in 2023, focuses on the supervisors of HDR students, supporting to integrate these concepts and methods into their research, supervision and teaching.

Participants in the Future Thinkers initiative are invited to prepare a research proposal that effectively integrates climate change thinking into their existing or planned (agricultural) research. Guidance and relevant capacity building are available during the proposal development phase – indeed, applicants are expected to participate in these co-learning experiences to ensure their eligibility for Future Thinkers’ Awards. Prospective projects will be selected to receive small supplementary funds of between AUD 5,000 and AUD 30,000 depending on the complexity of the proposed project. The funding will be provided to applicants to implement this additional research in the timeframe of a year.

Successful projects for support will be identified on the basis of: aligning with ACIAR research priorities for the region; involving interdisciplinary research and systems thinking; and offering linkages to current or planned ACIAR research projects that themselves show evidence of innovative approaches. The selection process will look for opportunities to enhance collaboration across sectors; for example, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, horticulture, water and soils, and natural resource management.

Emphasis will be placed on funding projects that foster interdisciplinary approaches that combine conventional biophysical research in agriculture with research in climate science and/or related areas of social science and policy. The funding provided through the Future Thinkers Awards will be available to link a PASS-CR supervisor, normally working with a current PASS-CR scholar or recently graduated alumnus, with an Australian, Pacific or international organization that is a recognised leader in innovative research in climate change (providing them with opportunities to visit and possibly work for a period within this organization) as well as strengthening links between the Australian and Pacific island project research partners, through additional exchange visits and other forms of collaboration.

Eligibility

In order to participate in the funding and capacity building opportunities offered by the Future Thinkers’ Awards, Supervisors and their project teams will need to meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. The main applicant needs to be qualified to supervise HDR students as a primary supervisor at Fiji National University (FNU) and/or University of the South Pacific (USP).

2. Be able to establish a research team with a clear Pacific, Australian or international climate change linkage (normally with an expert in climate science or a climate-related research discipline)
3. And, where possible, demonstrate a strong local (Fiji or Samoa) or broader Pacific linkage (normally with someone in policy or planning, government technical service and/or community engagement – and a person who is a previous ACIAR scholarship holder or has been involved in ACIAR projects). In this context, proposals involving communities and NGOs who are partners in existing ACIAR projects or that are part of the developing PASS-CR Long-term Research Hubs will be especially favourably regarded.
4. Applicants should provide a letter of support from their Head of School confirming their involvement in the PASS-CR program and/or their involvement in relevant teaching and supervision of HDR students and complete an EOI form.
5. Be available to participate in the two Future Thinkers' specialized workshops (April and May 2023). Participation in the in-person induction and at least one of the online webinars is a requirement to be able to apply.
6. Participate in at least one online coaching and support meeting with the Future Thinkers coordinators, to receive feedback and advice on their proposal.
7. Submit a completed application form before the deadline (end of June).

[Application process](#)

The application process will be conducted entirely through an online application form. As part of the proposal development process, applicants will be expected to participate in the two workshops and at least one individual coaching session with the coordinator of the Future Thinker's Awards. The coordinator is responsible for helping the applicants to prepare their proposals, providing feedback and helping to establish connections with Australian and international experts. Once applications have been received, they will be assessed against the selection criteria by a panel of independent assessors comprising an experienced academic from the academic's university (i.e. USP or FNU), an experienced researcher from an Australian or international centre of excellence in climate research, a representative of the PASS-CR program (as Chair) and a representative of ACIAR.

Selection criteria

A Maximum of 5 proposals will be selected. Applications will be scored based on the following selection criteria:

Criteria	Weight
Screening stage	
The application form is complete and the applicant meets all the eligibility criteria	100% (Incomplete applications or ineligible applications will not be progressed to the following stage).
Selection stage	
Well-articulated logic and connection to climate change principles and concepts: the proposal clearly align the aims, objectives and outputs to address a climate change-related challenge and is able to demonstrate a clear use of climate change-related concepts and analytical frameworks.	30%
Expected professional development outcomes: The applicants (supervisor and /team members) are expected to benefit directly through gaining new skills, knowledge and expanding their networks. The principal applicant (supervisor) should clearly show how the skills and experience gained will contribute to their future supervision of HDR students and, if applicable, to their broader teaching mission.	20%
Innovation: The proposal defines clear and innovative contributions to the field of research.	10%
Demonstrated additionality: the application highlights the additional CLIMATE-RELATED dimension that the project will bring to the applicant's existing skills and research.	10%

Interdisciplinarity: the project team, methodologies or activities propose demonstrate an inter-disciplinary approach.	10%
Clear definition of expected research outputs the proposal outlines strategies to produce research outputs such as publications, conference papers or reviews.	10%
Team and Network-building: Applicants are encouraged to build teams that include a current or recently graduated PASS-CR scholar and/or staff of government agencies or NGOs who have previously been involved in ACIAR research projects or capacity-building opportunities.	10%

Mentoring and support

As part of the Future Thinkers' Awards, applicants will be provided with dedicated support throughout the application and implementation process. In addition, applicants will be supported in the process of documenting and producing reports to highlight the outcomes and results of their experiences. The capacity building activities include practical in-person trainings, online seminars and one-on-one coaching sessions.

Schedule of key dates

Activity	Date	Modality
Launch of the initiative	Week of 21 st February	Email campaign, press release, information available in PASS-CR's website and social media.
Deadline for submission of the EOI form	17 th March 12:00 p.m. AEST	Online form submission.
Online Q&A Session	13 th March 10:00 a.m. AEST	Zoom session.

First inception workshop: Integrating climate change into agricultural research for development.	Two-day workshop during April-May dates to be confirmed.	In person workshop in Fiji, at USP or FNU. Approved applicants from Samoa will be asked to attend the training in Fiji with expenses covered.
Individual coaching opportunities	To be scheduled immediately after participation in the induction workshop.	Zoom or in person depending on availability.
Second workshop: Key methodologies used in climate change research.	One- to two-online training sessions during May/June	Online webinars.
Submission of applications.	Week of 3 rd July	Online submission using application form
Announcement of outcome of application	Week of 24 th July	Targeted email to all applicants informing the outcomes, press release and social media.
Contracting of projects	August-September	This will include modifying any elements of the project recommended by the selection committee.
Implementation of projects	September 2023 to September 2024	Projects need to be implemented within a year and reporting will be done quarterly to track progress and capture learnings.