

2025 Melbourne Conference Grant Report

Danielle O'Brien, Research Administration Coordinator
Edith Cowan University

I began my Research Administration career in 2011 in the United States. In 2024 I relocated back to Australia and began my position at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in August. I have predominately worked within the PreAward space and since being back in Aus, have noticed that research administration in a US setting, is NOT the same as research administration in an Australian setting. I have been progressing through the ARMS Foundation Level Accreditation Program, to help learn the nuances in this new landscape, but I was keen to attend the ARMS Conference to further my knowledge (especially around ARC and NHMRC) and to network with new colleagues around the country.

I submitted an abstract to give a presentation, which was accepted, however I then realised that due to my short time with ECU, I was not eligible for internal Professional Development funding. Successfully applying for the 2025 Melbourne Conference Grant provided me the opportunity to attend ARMS25, give my presentation on Succession Planning, listen to multiple other presentations (broadening my research knowledge), facilitate a three-presentation session and most importantly – network.

Attending a conference alone is never easy, especially when so many institutions send large cohorts who all mingle with each other. I gave my presentation in the first timeslot of the conference, which did provide an opening for people throughout the three days to stop me as I moved from session to session and to comment on my talk. Succession planning is necessary to ensure business continuity, and many institutions lack formal plans in this space. I was able to speak with many individuals from across Australia, New Zealand and Singapore on tips to start identifying and nurturing potential leaders within their organisations.

I was able to make many new connections and since returning home, continued to be in touch with several of them, already making plans to collaborate on a presentation for the next conference. I enjoyed the many keynote speakers included in the program. Kevin Sheedy was surprisingly enjoyable (as a Freo Dockers fan!) and Dame Juliet Gerrard has amazingly dealt with some huge crises as the Chief Scientific Advisor to the last three New Zealand Prime Ministers. It was inspirational listening to her. Most of all, hearing that so many of us experience the same challenges, and that the challenges are very similar to what I was used to in the US... while the landscape may be different here, it is reassuring that the research administration community is truly supportive of each other, no matter where you go!

Having not spent any time in Melbourne previously, I did take advantage of being in a new city and arrived a few days ahead of the conference. My biggest highlights were seeing 'Beetlejuice The Musical' (amazing Australian talent – comparable to any New York Broadway show!) and finding the only Cheese Train in the Southern Hemisphere! It was a fabulous city to visit.

Overall, the conference was a great experience, made possible through the 2025 Melbourne Conference Grant. I am so appreciative of the financial assistance. I now look forward to next year, when the conference will be held in Perth, and hopefully many more of my colleagues will also be able to attend.