

INORMS Congress 2025, Madrid, Spain

INORMS Report: Lucy Donaldson, Monash University

Attending the INORMS Congress 2025 in Madrid, supported by the ARMS-INORMS Travel Award, was a highlight of my professional career! Not just for the tapas and rioja, but for the opportunity to learn from other Research Management Professionals (RMPs) from all over the world and how they are supporting the scale and impact of research.

I am relatively new to the research management profession (about two years), although I have been working in higher education institutions for over a decade. My first ARMS conference was in 2024 at Darwin, and I was immediately impressed by the dedication and knowledge exchange opportunities. I was lucky enough to present twice there and had many insightful conversations about progressing the research management profession as a way to create systems change. Bolstered by those discussions, I thought I'd throw my hat in the ring for INORMS 2025.

The Madrid location meant it would be competitive - who wouldn't want to go to Spain?! - so after I submitted my abstracts I also joined the expert evaluation committee. Being on that panel gave me insight into the achievements of other institutions, and how competitive it was – 700 abstracts were received, with only 20% of submissions successful.



Image caption: Tapas Tour for INORMS attendees in the heart of Madrid, with delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Greece, Ireland, Romania, and The UK!

Happily, I was awarded two spots - an oral presentation on *The Incubator* (Monash's international research grant scheme for interdisciplinary research teams) and a poster on *Challenge-Led Research and Innovation*. I was thrilled to receive an ARMS travel grant, and excited about the possibility to engage with 2,200 people from 67 countries about how we can develop the profession beyond technical skills to explore the soul of research management in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world.



Image caption: Me with coffee in hand, ready to hear the opening plenary with 2,200 others (Coffee rating 8/10 compared to Melbourne coffee, but acceptable!!)



Image caption: Lucy Donaldson and Dr Matthew French presenting 'Mission-Possible for Challenge-led research collaborations' at the lunchtime poster session.

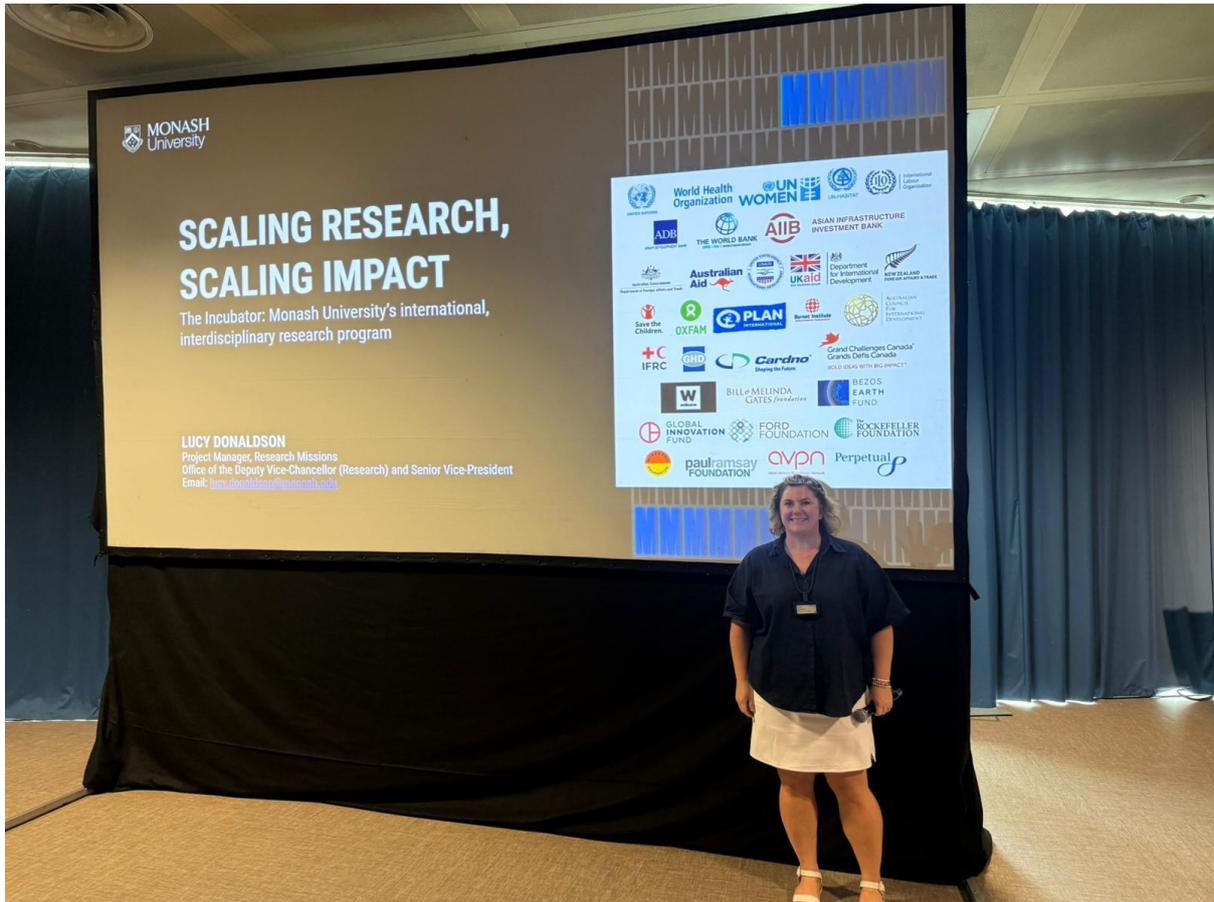


Image caption: I presented on day two of the conference, attended by many ARMS colleagues, whose smiling faces in the crowd helped calm my nerves.

My biggest takeaways and reflections from INORMS 2025:

1. **Few institutions globally have large-scale, formal mechanisms to support 'pre-grant' activities.** This is especially true for major research collaborations that require external consortia partners. There were many presentations, posters, and conversations on new researcher development programs, but these were only offered to select cohorts, applied within a specific discipline, or were point-in-time activities (e.g., during COVID). How to design and implement effective pipeline support activities, and the institution-wide structures to enable them, remains underexplored.
2. **RMPs must engage as Strategic Connectors.** In a world thirsty for efficiency gains with AI, “working smarter not harder”, asynchronous working where you can receive requests at any time, from anywhere in the world - how we show up to support research, and the researchers themselves, requires strategic nous. At my presentation, there was intense interest regarding how Monash offers **"bespoke advisory"** connecting researchers across traditional silos. In conversations with other attendees, I learnt how they connect within their institution and externally with partners in policy, government, funders, and industry organisations. RMPs around the world are creating greater impact by leaning more on their ability to strategically connect the dots.
3. **To Progress Your Career, Additionality is the Accelerator.** I had wide-ranging conversations on professional development with senior leaders from global institutions, and a pattern emerged: the administrative fundamentals (grants, contracts, agreements) are baseline requirements. The true opportunity for career advancement lies in additionality. This looks like applying your whole knowledge base—from institutional politics to contemporary funding trends—to provide strategic, holistic guidance. By helping researchers make smarter decisions and articulating their value in new ways, RMPs can showcase their modern, strategic skill set and solidify their value proposition to university leadership.

The INORMS 2025 Congress confirmed that the RMA profession is more critical than ever, sitting right at the intersection of geopolitical complexity, technological change, and global challenges. I came back inspired to keep learning and sharing my learnings with colleagues - I joined the ARMS Major Research Collaborations SIG and am delighted to now be one of the stream leads (Pipeline). Above all, I hope to continue meeting, working with, and learning from colleagues across the ARMS network, and am deeply grateful for the chance to contribute to our profession's collective progress.

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