

ARMS Conference 2025 Learnings Report – Marina Zupan

Attending the ARMS 2025 Conference in Melbourne provided me with valuable insights and professional development aligned with my role supporting health and medical research funding and researcher development. My key learnings & takeaways from the conference are outlined as follows:

1. Learnings from the Pre-Conference Workshop

The workshop *“Beyond Grants: Building Strategic Researcher Development Programs to Transform Research Culture”* provided me with an increased understanding of important principles in researcher development, as well as a hands-on opportunity to collaborate with other research managers to apply those principles in a practical exercise (developing a program for an example scenario). Learnings included:

- The need to understand researcher challenges distinct from those of research managers, as an “empathetic practitioner”, for the planning and delivery of researcher development initiatives.
- How to apply systems thinking and ecosystem mapping prior to implementing development programs.
- The importance of contextualizing development frameworks to institutional and researcher needs, as well as how to identify and involve the right experts.

Importantly, these insights will inform the refinement of Flinders’ researcher development initiatives, particularly the NHMRC Investigator Grant Bootcamp program I lead, by embedding more reflective, collaborative, and context-sensitive approaches.

2. Learnings from Sessions and Plenaries

Several sessions offered practical strategies and policy insights directly applicable to my role:

- **Strategic Grant Support:** Talks by Dr Alice Yang and Dr Sonja Tesanovic Kljajic highlighted scalable infrastructure and school-level engagement models to streamline high-volume grant support - relevant to improving Flinders’ internal processes.
- **Funding Strategy:** Dr Noni Creasey’s Go/No-Go framework was my personal highlight from the conference and provided actionable tools for advising researchers on funding readiness and strategic alignment.
- **Research Impact & Policy:** Plenaries by Ryan Winn and Prof Juliet Gerrard deepened my understanding of the policy landscape and the role of science communication in driving impact at the policy/national level.
- **Inclusive Research Environments:** Talks on neurodiversity and Indigenous knowledge systems underscored the need for inclusive practices in research support - an area I aim to build my understanding of so that I can integrate it deliberately into my work.

3. Networking and Professional Growth

Engagement with peers through SIG sessions, informal networking, and following delivery of my talk *‘Design and implementation of a targeted experiential learning “Bootcamp” for NHMRC Investigator Grant applicants’*, has greatly expanded my professional connections; particularly with professionals managing high-volume competitive grant schemes. These interactions have particularly provided me with a refreshed perspective on how to tackle widespread challenges in supporting researchers with competitive funding applications. Further, presenting and discussing my own work has provided extremely valuable and practical feedback I can use to enhance researcher development initiatives at Flinders University.

Conclusion: Participation in ARMS 2025 has strengthened my strategic capabilities in grant development and researcher support, including directly addressing several learning needs I had identified prior to the conference (e.g., how to design researcher development programs, how to manage high-load rounds, how to identify competitive funding bids). It has also supported me personally as an early career research manager, to become more assured and flexible in my approach.

The learnings will be integrated into Flinders’ funding strategy, training resources, and support programs, contributing to a more responsive and impactful research development environment.