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Wine Australia opens competition for research projects under a five-year A$35 million fund

The research stream seeks outside co-investment in response to falling levy revenue, with expressions of interest due by December 23, 2026

Monday, November 23, 2026



Wine Australia opened a competitive call on Monday, November 23, for research and innovation projects under a fund that aims to mobilize A$35 million over five years for Australia’s grape and wine sector.

The call is part of the Research & Innovation Fund, or RIF, one of two streams in the Australian Wine Future Fund, a broader program created in 2026 with a target of attracting A$50 million by 2030. Wine Australia said the research stream is designed to

bring in external grants and partner co-investment for projects focused on vineyard performance, product development, sustainability and production efficiency.

The move creates a new co-investment channel for an industry facing lower income from producer levies, which have traditionally helped finance research. Wine Australia, the federal statutory authority responsible for wine sector research, market development and export regulation, said the new structure is meant to supplement levy-funded work rather than replace it.

Martin Cole, Wine Australia’s chief executive officer, said the broader fund was set up in response to declining levy revenue and was intended to increase support for projects and technologies with the potential to improve long-term productivity, sustainability and resilience for grape growers and winemakers.

The A$35 million figure is a funding target over five years, not an amount awarded on Monday, November 23, and not a sum reserved in full for the current round. Wine Australia has not published a separate budget for this expression of interest process. Within the Australian Wine Future Fund, the research stream accounts for 70% of the overall A$50 million target.

Applicants have until December 23, 2026, to submit expressions of interest in the current round. Wine Australia said it expects to assess applications in early 2027. After that, the agency plans to keep the process open throughout the year with quarterly assessment rounds.

The agency said projects seeking support must align with Wine Australia’s 2025-30 strategic plan and the One Grape & Wine Sector Plan, both of which place innovation, sustainability and technology adoption at the center of future growth and competitiveness. The fund is structured as a co-investment model, meaning Wine Australia expects Commonwealth money to be matched or supplemented by contributions from research organizations, private companies, state governments and industry groups.

Wine Australia said the aim is to accelerate projects that address the industry's most pressing problems and produce practical results. The areas highlighted by the agency include stronger vineyard performance, more efficient production systems, environmental sustainability and new product opportunities.

The launch also comes as the agency points to existing projects that have already received support through the research stream. Those projects include work with Wine Victoria to support growers and winemakers, a collaboration involving Wines of Western Australia and the Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to improve environmental sustainability and profitability in that state's wine industry, and a joint investment with Vinehealth Australia to modernize South Australia's vineyard register and align it with the national register.

Other previously backed work includes a strategic research agreement with the Australian Wine Research Institute and a project with Agriculture Victoria to develop and expand tools for monitoring and managing grapevine phylloxera, a pest that can damage vineyards and raise production costs.

The second arm of the Australian Wine Future Fund is the Venture Investments Portfolio, which has a five-year target of A$15 million. Wine Australia said that stream is intended to attract private capital and address gaps in wine sector innovation through a partnership with Tenacious Ventures. Under that arrangement, Wine Australia plans to invest A$2.5 million in non-levy funds alongside other investors as part of the effort to reach the A$15 million target.

Taken together, the two streams are meant to diversify how innovation is financed in an industry that is under pressure to lift efficiency and adapt to changing market and environmental conditions. Wine Australia's position is that the new program can help maintain research activity at a time when levy income is no longer sufficient on its own to support the level of investment the sector wants.

The announcement does not guarantee funding for any specific applicant, and the final amount committed to individual projects will depend on the assessment process and the ability of applicants to secure partner backing. But by opening the first competitive round, Wine Australia has started the process of channeling outside capital into wine

and grape research that the agency says is needed to strengthen the sector’s productivity, sustainability and long-term resilience.