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Call for Proposals: Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) on Neurodiversity and Violent Extremism

REA Call Specification

Under the terms of its Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Home Affairs, the AVERT Research Network is seeking high quality proposals for the following Rapid Evidence Assessment. The REA topic and content have been developed by Research and Evaluation Working Group (REWG) members of the Countering Violent Extremism Subcommittee (CVESC) of the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC) in consultation with AVERT.

REA Topic

What role, if any, neurodiversity (and autism spectrum disorder [ASD] in particular) plays in the context of radicalisation to violent extremism?

[DOWNLOAD REA AND PROPOSAL TEMPLATE \(/S/FINAL-2022-REWG-REA-CALL-SPECIFICATION-NUERODIVERSITY.PDF\)](#)

Call Context

While instances of neurodivergent individuals, specifically those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), have been limited, there is growing concern that neurodivergent individuals could be at risk of being targeted for recruitment by violent extremist movements. There have been a number of recent high-profile cases where ASD may have been a factor in the perpetrator's behaviour. Anders Breivik, who was responsible for the 2011 mass killing in Norway, was diagnosed with both

having Asperger's syndrome and mental disorders. At the same time, neurodiversity has been used as a legal defence. Alex Minassian, who was responsible for the Toronto incel attack 2018 used his autism diagnosis in his terrorism trial to argue that he was incapable of understanding the gravity of his actions.

In addition to these high-profile examples, an additional number of neurodivergent individuals have become involved in violent extremism. (Allely, 2017) (It has also been revealed that there is a high number of people with ASD who have been referred to the UK's PREVENT program (Grierson, 2021), prompting questions about how neurodiversity features in violent extremist behaviour.

Therefore, in seeking to understand what role, if any, neurodiversity (and autism spectrum disorder [ASD] in particular) plays in the context of radicalisation to violent extremism, we are interested in a Rapid Evidence Assessment that addresses the following:

- A review of the research literature on the prevalence of neurodiversity (ASD in particular) in violent extremist cohorts in any country or region, including prevalence concentration related to age/gender/socio-economic cohorts
- A review of literature focused on the online recruitment and radicalisation of individuals with neurodiversity/ASD, in particular, whether these processes are discernible to their close contacts, family or community
- Available evidence regarding the prevalence of ASD in the violent extremist cohort compared to the broader community
- Whether neurodiverse individuals who become involved in violent extremism more likely to be lone actors or identify with a group
- Whether neurodiversity and ASD present any complications in counter-terrorism threat/risk assessment
- Whether pathways to engage in and disengage from violent extremism might differ for neurodiverse individuals in terms of behavioural indicators and intervention strategies

Jamie Grierson, "'Staggeringly high' number of autistic people in UK Prevent scheme," The Guardian, 7 July 2021.

Claire Allely, "Are autistic people at greater risk of being radicalised?" The Conversation, 22 June 2017.

Call Proposer / Contact Information

Primary: John Cianchi and Andrew Wright, Countering Violent Extremism Branch, Social Cohesion Division, Department of Home Affairs.

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Secondary: Research and Evaluation Working Group Secretariat, Department of Home Affairs

Email: rewg.secretariat@homeaffairs.gov.au (mailto:rewg.secretariat@homeaffairs.gov.au)

Deliverables

A rapid evidence assessment (REA) of the available research literature and evidence on the above research topic. The REA should address:

REA Report of no more than 30 pages, including:

- An Executive Summary (no more than 3 pages), including recommendations
- Responses to review questions outlined in the Call Context
- REA methodology, including search terms used for the REA
- Bibliography

Timeframe

- Call for proposals close **25 February 2022**
- Successful applicant notified by **18 March 2022**
- Final draft due and consultation w call proposers due by **15 June 2022**
- Final report due **30 June 2022**

Funding

\$ 23,250.00 (GST exclusive) per REA. Funding will be administered by AVERT following execution of the REA agreement between REWG and the subcontracting agreement between the successful applicant and AVERT. Invoices for funding/payment shall be issued by the successful applicant on commencement of REA and paid on delivery of REA deliverables per contract agreement.

Contract

AVERT will administer the contract agreement with the successful applicant as per the subcontracting guidelines established in the signed PGPA Funding Agreement with Home Affairs and AVERT.

Call Specification Administration

The AVERT Research Network will administer the call specification issued by the REWG-CVESC through the AVERT Research Network Memorandum of Understanding with Department of Home Affairs.

The AVERT Coordinator will determine eligibility of each proposal to be reviewed based on the below criteria and distribute eligible proposals to members of the REA Assessment Panel (see assessment process below). The REA Assessments of proposals will be concluded by 11 March 2022.

The AVERT Coordinator will forward the REA Assessments to the REWG (via the REWG Secretariate) for their consideration and decision. The REWG will inform AVERT of its decision. The successful applicant/s will then be notified by the AVERT Coordinator no later than 18 March 2022.

The AVERT Network will execute a supplier agreement with the successful applicant no later than 18 March 2022 and then administer funding per the conditions in the supplier agreement.

The final REA deliverables will be due by **30 June 2022** via submission to: adi-avert@deakin.edu.au (mailto:adi-avert@deakin.edu.au)

Open/Close Dates

Call for proposals will **open on 3 February 2022 and close on 25 February 2022**.

All applicants will be **advised of the outcome by 18 March 2022**.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to apply, at least one applicant on the proposal should be a Research Member of AVERT or an AVERT-identified researcher who has expertise on the REA topic and must be affiliated with an accredited university. Track record of lead applicant/s in relation to expertise in the REA topic will be considered.

Proposal Assessment Process and Timelines

Eligible proposals will be distributed to the REA Assessment Panel, comprised of two nominated members of the AVERT Executive and/or AVERT Steering Committee, plus two external academic reviewers (whether or not AVERT members) with the relevant expertise in the selected REA topic to assess proposals against the criteria outlined in the Call Specification. Applicants are asked to nominate up to **two suggested reviewers** for their proposal who can serve as external academic reviewers. The REA Assessment Panel may consider using, but is not obliged to use, either or both suggested reviewers for a particular proposal.

All assessors serving on the REA Assessment Panel:

- a. Cannot submit their own proposal for review in the same REA round or topic area
 - b. Cannot be from the same institution as the applicant
 - c. Must complete the Conflict of Interest declaration provided as part of the application documentation
 - d. Must have demonstrated broad subject matter expertise in the topic covered by the proposal.
- The applicant will need to provide two (2)-page CVs for any nominated external reviewers for consideration by the assessment panel

Reviewers will assess proposals for REWG consideration based on a review template (to be provided by AVERT Coordinator). Proposals will be assessed based on assessment criteria (see attached) that evaluates quality of the proposal, methodology, feasibility, value for money and the track record of the applicants.

The REA Assessment Panel will collate reviews for all proposals and then rank the proposals based on reviewer responses. The deliberations of the REA Assessment Panel will conclude by 11 March 2022. The AVERT Coordinator will forward the rankings to the REWG (via the REWG Secretariat) for their consideration and final decision.

Successful applicant/s will be notified by the AVERT Coordinator no later than 18 March 2022.

The AVERT Network will execute a supplier agreement with the successful applicant and **the final deliverables will be due by 30 June 2022.**

Funds will be dispersed to the successful applicant based on the milestones and timelines established in the supplier agreement.

Intellectual Property

The author/s own/s the intellectual property rights of the Deliverables (excluding any pre-existing Material in which the Commonwealth or another party may own IP) that are created for the purpose of and during the period of the REA. The author/s of the deliverables grant to (and if applicable will procure for) the Commonwealth and members of ANZCTC a non-exclusive, irrevocable, fee-free licence to use, reproduce, communicate, publish, adapt and sub-license the Deliverables, including any Reports (including the Activity Report), required by the agreement for any purpose.

Response Requirements

Responses to the call for REA proposals to submit a detailed proposal of no more than 8 pages (excluding bibliography and appendices) using the standardised template (attached). Two (2)-page CVs of the applicants and proposed reviewers, as well as confirmation of the applicant/s AVERT membership, should also be included along with the REA proposal. Confirmation of AVERT membership may be obtained from the AVERT Coordinator at adi-avert@deakin.edu.au (<mailto:adi-avert@deakin.edu.au>)

Attachments

- REA Proposal Template
- Conflict of Interest Declaration for nominated reviewers
- REA Proposal Assessment Criteria

Queries

Any queries related to this Call Specification should be addressed to the AVERT Coordinator at adi-avert@deakin.edu.au (<mailto:adi-avert@deakin.edu.au>)

The deadline for questions or queries will be COB 18 February 2022.

The **AVERT** (Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism) Research Network is a multidisciplinary research initiative based at Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) in Melbourne, Australia.

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