

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING ARCHAEOLOGISTS INCORPORATED

AACAI Recommended Minimum Fee Scale

AACAI is the peak professional body representing consultant archaeologists in Australia. Our [Constitution](#) sets out the fundamental principles and key objects of our organisation which includes maintaining and encouraging professional standards by fellow consultants. Our members sign up to work under a [Code of Ethics](#) that outline principles to govern professional standards in line with international best practice.

Summary

The AACAI Recommended Minimum Fee Scale establishes a rate range for the lowest expected fees for specific services and/or tasks as they relate to consultant archaeologists in Australia. AACAI recognises that the fee scale can be referred to by individuals and companies that employ or engage consultant archaeologists and/or have some need for estimating costs for a project that involves archaeological expertise. The fee scale refers to minimum charge-out rates, i.e. the minimum recommendation for what an individual or company would charge their client for an archaeological project.

The table below lists general levels and roles of consultant archaeologists in line with their experience and qualifications, and provides a recommended minimum range of rates (per hour) for each level.

Recommended Minimum Fee Scale

Level	Role	Tasks	Minimum Qualifications	Minimum Consulting Experience	Minimum Hourly Rate Range (AUD, ex-GST)
5	Principal Archaeologist	Lead for archaeological project (project manager)	Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology or related field	7 years	\$200-250
4	Senior Archaeologist	In-field manager/director or specialist advisor (works independently)	Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology or related field	5 years	\$180-200
3	Archaeologist	In-field supervisor (can work unsupervised)	Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology or related field	1 year	\$150-180
2	Assistant Archaeologist	Assistant to in-field works (must be supervised)	Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology or related field	n/a	\$110-150
1	Trainee Archaeologist	Assistant to in-field works (can only be supervised in presence of Principal or Senior)	Degree in Archaeology or related field	n/a	\$80-110



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Notes on Recommended Minimum Fee Scale

- Each level and role listed here refers to a consultant archaeologist who is an employee (permanent, part-time, or casual), director/owner, or a sub-consultant of a company engaged on a project requiring archaeological expertise. These levels and roles are explained in more detail below.
- The rates listed are minimum charge-out rates, i.e. the minimum recommendation for what an individual or company would charge their client for an archaeological project.
- The rates listed are not the minimum recommended pay rates that an archaeological consulting firm would pay their employees and/or sub-consultants. However, they are considered to include the cost of leave, superannuation, insurance, administration, business risk, and all other costs of running a business, in addition to the remuneration offered to an employee.
- The 'Hourly Rate Range' should not limit consultant archaeologists from charging higher rates if they wish to do so. Generally, rates vary depending on the nature of the work being undertaken and the level of expertise engaged. The lower end of the rate range is the recommended minimum.
- Rates above the recommended minimum for each role should also be expected when consultancy briefs include higher risk, giving expert testimony, appearing in court, or advising on strategy or policy. Higher rates should also be expected when engaging highly experienced principals and directors or where highly specialist skills and advice are required.
- The rates listed do not include project expenses, such as travel, meals, and accommodation – these should be negotiated for each individual project, following, where available, reasonable allowance rates published by the Australian Taxation Office.
- The rates listed do not include Goods and Service Tax (GST).
- The rates listed are current for the 2025-2026 tax year and may be adjusted with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in future years.
- All individuals and companies that employ or engage consultant archaeologists should follow fair work practices, rights, and obligations in line with Australian law (more information can be found here: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/>).



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Engagement of Consultant Archaeologists

Individuals or organisations engaging a consultant archaeologist should check that the consultant archaeologist is appropriately qualified, experienced, and have the knowledge and skills to undertake a reliable and quality assessment to the required standards. If an archaeologist is to be commercially engaged, the quickest way to ensure they are appropriately qualified is to confirm they are a member of AACAI.¹

AACAI expects all consultant archaeologists to be honest about their skills and experience level, and ensure the work tasks and advice they provide are strictly within their areas of expertise and knowledge.

Nothing in the AACAI Recommended Minimum Fee Scale should be taken to infer that a more qualified and experienced individual should not from time to time be employed in a capacity of lesser responsibility. For example, an experienced and qualified archaeologist who normally works as a Principal Archaeologist might choose to work in a lower position to work on a particularly interesting project.

Overview of Levels and Roles

Level 5 – Principal Archaeologist

A Principal Archaeologist is qualified to be the primary person responsible for an entire archaeological project i.e. can act as a Project Manager or Lead In-Field Archaeologist.

They should hold an Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology (or a related field) and have, at a minimum, 7 years' experience working in consulting archaeology, with at least 3 years' experience as an In-Field Manager or Director.

AACAI recommends that all consultants who are engaged as Principal Archaeologists should meet the criteria for AACAI Full Membership.

Level 4 – Senior Archaeologist

A Senior Archaeologist is qualified to direct and oversee the running of an archaeological project in the field i.e. can act as an In-Field Manager or Director. They can work independently without supervision, and will be responsible for team management, implementing in-field safety procedures, and ensuring archaeological practice standards are maintained.

They should hold an Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology (or related field) and have at, a minimum, 5 years' experience working in consulting archaeology, with at least 3 years' experience as an In-Field Supervisor.

AACAI recommends that all consultants who are engaged as Senior Archaeologists should meet the criteria for AACAI Full Membership.

¹ In Victoria, the *Minister's Guidelines on Heritage Advisor Qualifications and Experience* lists Full Membership of AACAI as an option for meeting the 'appropriate qualifications' requirements to be engaged as a Heritage Advisor.



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Level 3 – Archaeologist

An Archaeologist is qualified to supervise a team of Assistant Archaeologists working on an archaeological project in the field i.e. can act as an In-Field Supervisor. They can work independently and without supervision, but they must report to a Senior Archaeologist.

They should hold an Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology (or a related field) and have at, a minimum, 1 years' experience working in consulting archaeology as an Assistant Archaeologist.

AACAI recommends that all consultants who are engaged as Archaeologists should meet the criteria for AACAI Associate Membership.

Level 2 – Assistant Archaeologist

An Assistant Archaeologist is qualified to assist work on an archaeological project in the field, but their work should be reviewed or supervised by an In-Field Supervisor or In-Field Manager/Director.

They should hold an Honours Degree or Post-Graduate Degree in Archaeology (or a related field).

AACAI recommends that all consultants who are engaged as Assistant Archaeologists should meet the criteria for AACAI Associate Membership.

Level 1 – Trainee Archaeologist

A Trainee Archaeologist can, in principle, assist work on an archaeological project in the field. However, they must always be supervised by an In-Field Manager or Director i.e. a consultant archaeologist who has a minimum of 5 years' experience.

A Trainee Archaeologist may not have an Honours Degree in Archaeology (or a related field) but they should have a Bachelor's Degree in Archaeology (or a related field) at a minimum.

The purpose for engaging a Trainee Archaeologist is to allow for the provision of closely-monitored, in-field training and tuition by a consultant archaeologist so that the individual may gain the required practical experience to become an Assistant Archaeologist.

Sub-consultants

AACAI advises that a consultant archaeologist acting as a sub-consultant to a company for an archaeological project should also follow the Recommended Minimum Fee Scale. However, it is acknowledged that the sub-consultant pay rate will need to be negotiated between the company and the sub-consultant.

The category of sub-consultant is defined not only by their skills and experience but by the nature of the work to be undertaken. A sub-consultant is often engaged to undertake specific parts of a contract awarded to a company. Overall responsibility for completion of the project lies with the company but the sub-consultant may be a sole trader with many years' experience and is engaged to carry out a substantial part of the project



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independently and without supervision i.e. as a Level 5 – Principal Archaeologist or a Level 4 – Senior Archaeologist. However, there may be instances where a company engages a sub-consultant with lesser experience and who works casually at another company i.e. a Level 3 – Archaeologist or a Level 4 – Assistant Archaeologist.

Experienced and expert sub-consultants, particularly those with highly specialised skills or capabilities, may charge rates over and above the recommended minimum scale commensurate with their experience and expertise.

Specialist Archaeologists

Specialist Archaeologists are individuals who have specialist qualifications or experience in archaeology, e.g. the statistical analysis of Aboriginal stone artefacts, use-wear and residue analysis, zooarchaeology, geoarchaeology, geochronology, geophysical analysis, GIS spatial analysis, rock art, maritime archaeology etc. They are employed or engaged by a company as a sub-consultant where their expertise is required on a project, and therefore, they should follow the guidance for sub-consultants described above.

A Specialist Archaeologist should be able to command a higher hourly rate than an Assistant Archaeologist, as they will normally prepare a written contribution and/or provide specialist expert advice for the project. At a minimum, they should be engaged as a Level 3 – Archaeologist.

A Specialist Archaeologist must hold a Post-Graduate Degree or equivalent in the specialist area of archaeological study that they are being engaged for, and have at, a minimum, 2 years' experience working as a professional archaeologist.

The Australian Archaeology Skills Passport

AACAI recommends that early career consultant archaeologists utilise the [Australian Archaeology Skills Passport](#), which was designed by the Australian National Committee for Archaeology Teaching and Learning (ANCATL) to provide a clear guide as to what is expected as a professional archaeologist working in Australia.

Level 1 – Trainee Archaeologists and Level 2 – Assistant Archaeologists should be developing their basic skills (Group A Skills) by creating a Professional Development plan outlined in the passport and actively working with their employer to gain training and experience in their first 3 years as a consultant archaeologist. In-Field Supervisors or In-Field Directors/Managers can evaluate the level demonstrated for a particular skill and they can sign this off in the passport. The passport also provides a guide for specialist archaeological skills (Group B Skills), which are also relevant to Level 3 – Archaeologists working as specialists on a project.



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AACAI Membership

Finally, AACAI members are assessed on their professional qualifications, experience, and expertise as it relates to consulting archaeology. [Full Members](#) are fully qualified individuals who are competent to work as independent, professional consulting archaeologists and who have a broad range of research and management skills– they have over 5 years’ experience and hold appropriate qualifications in archaeology as well as specialist skills recognised by the Association. [Associate Members](#) are generally recent graduates or early career archaeologists with less than 5 years’ experience – they hold appropriate qualifications in archaeology and are still increasing their levels of work experience and management skills.

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