PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS 2019 GUIDE FOR PEER REVIEWERS

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1 INTRODUCTION

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for managing the Australian Government’s investment in health and medical research in a manner consistent with Commonwealth legislation and guidelines. NHMRC has a responsibility to ensure taxpayers’ funds are invested appropriately to support the best health and medical research. Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Partnership Projects peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation and guidelines
- how to declare and manage conflicts of interest
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- Partnership Projects 2019 Guidelines, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.

2 PRINCIPLES, CONDUCT AND OBLIGATIONS DURING PEER REVIEW

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

2.1 NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review

NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) are high-level, guiding statements that underpin all NHMRC’s peer review processes, and include:

- **Fairness.** Peer review processes are fair and seen to be fair by all.
- **Transparency.** Applies to all stages of peer review.
- **Independence.** Peer reviewers provide independent advice. There is also independent oversight of peer review processes by independent Chairs and Observers.
- **Appropriateness and balance.** There is appropriate experience, expertise and representation of peer reviewers assessing applications.
- **Research community participation.** Persons holding taxpayer-funded grants should willingly make themselves available to participate in peer review processes, whenever possible.
- **Confidentiality.** Participants respect that confidentiality is important to the fairness and robustness of peer review.
- **Impartiality.** Peer review is objective and impartial, with appropriate processes in place to manage real and perceived conflicts of interest (Col).
- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

Additional details underpinning the Principles can be found at Attachment A.
2.2 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code) requires researchers participating in peer review do so in a way that is ‘fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content’.


2.3 Disclosure of Interests

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with Part 5, section 42A of the NHMRC Act, sections 16A and 16B of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 and the NHMRC’s Privacy Policy.

This is to ensure that where a material personal interest arises, the individual will not be in a position to influence, or perceive to influence, the proper performance of the participant’s responsibilities to NHMRC. The perception of an interest is as important as any actual interest.

2.3.1 What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)?

A CoI exists where there is a divergence between the individual interests of a person and their professional responsibilities such that an independent observer might reasonably conclude that the professional actions of that person are unduly influenced by their own interests.

For NHMRC peer review purposes, interests may fall into the broad domains of:

- involvement with the application under review
- collaborations
- working relationships
- professional relationships and interests
- social relationships or interests
- teaching or supervisory relationships
- financial relationships or interests
- other interests or relationships.

Researchers frequently have a CoI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under consideration. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

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1 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 was released in June 2018 and institutions are expected to meet the requirements of the 2018 Code no later than 1 July 2019.

2 An “Interest” is defined in section 4 of the NHMRC Act as meaning “any direct or indirect, pecuniary or non-pecuniary, interest”. Under section 29 of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act), “an official … who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest”.

3 Made under subsection 29(2) of the PGPA Act.
An outline of potential CoI situations is provided for peer reviewers at Attachment B.

### 2.3.2 Failure to Declare an Interest

The NHMRC Act requires interests to be identified and specifies the courses of action that apply when this requirement has not been met.

- Section 42A of the NHMRC Act requires members to disclose interests in matters being considered.
- Paragraph Section 44B(3)(b) requires the Minister or the CEO to terminate the appointment of a member for failing to comply, without reasonable excuse, with the disclosure of interest requirements outlined in the NHMRC Act.

It is important for participants to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process.

### 2.4 Research integrity issues

The scrutiny of an application during peer review can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information). Where such concerns arise, peer reviewers should raise these issues separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to do this is provided at Attachment C.

Where a peer reviewer identifies possible issues about research integrity, these are managed by NHMRC through a separate process. Applications that are the subject of a research misconduct allegation will continue to progress through NHMRC peer review processes while any investigations are ongoing. NHMRC liaises with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation, and, if necessary, will take action under the NHMRC policy on misconduct related to NHMRC funding (the Misconduct Policy).

#### 2.4.1 Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Reviewers directly engaged with the peer review of an application must not contact applicants about their application. Similarly, applicants are not allowed to make contact or attempt to influence anyone about their application who is directly engaged with its peer review. Where a reviewer contacts an applicant, the consequences may be removal of the reviewer from the process, and potential exclusion from future NHMRC peer review. Where an applicant contacts a reviewer, consequences could include exclusion of an application/s from consideration. In either case, contact between applicants and reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

### 2.5 Freedom of Information

NHMRC is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

### 2.6 Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process that may be received from applicants. As part of these dealings, NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information of particular application/s. Further information regarding the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the NHMRC website.
3 PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS PEER REVIEW PROCESS

3.1 Overview of the Partnership Projects peer review process

The Partnership Projects scheme opened on 16 January 2019. Applications can be submitted at any time during the year, up until 4 December 2019. This is to allow researchers and Partner Organisations to develop timely collaborations.

Peer review of applications will occur in three distinct peer review cycles (PRCs) as detailed in Table 1 below. The PRC in which an application is reviewed depends on when the application is submitted and whether it has met minimum data requirements. Please note that the dates provided at Table 1 are indicative only.
Table 1: Partnership Projects peer review dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRC2</th>
<th>PRC3</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Apr</td>
<td>14 Aug 2019</td>
<td>4 Dec 2019</td>
<td>Deadline for Partnership Projects application submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>December 2019</td>
<td>Application eligibility review and confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>December 2019</td>
<td>Peer reviewers declare Conflicts of Interest (CoI) and suitability against applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>Aug/Sept 2019</td>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>Allocation of applications and members to panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>Jan/Feb 2020</td>
<td>Indigenous assessments obtained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>Initial panel briefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>February 2020</td>
<td>Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against Partnership Projects Assessment Criteria for each allocated application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>July 2020</td>
<td>Notification of outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the Partnership Projects peer review process are identified in the table below.

**Partnership Projects Peer Review Participants Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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</table>
| Panel Chair (Chair)    | The Chair's role is to ensure NHMRC’s procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being discussed at the panel meeting. Chairs are independent of the review of applications, and must manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide. Prior to the panel meeting Chairs will:  
  • familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff  
  • identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel  
  • familiarise themselves with ALL the applications to be considered by their panel, excluding those for which they have declared a high CoI. During the panel meeting Chairs will:  
  • take appropriate action for each declared CoI  
  • ask peer reviewers to declare any associations with other reviewers (eg current and previous collaborations) so that other panel members are aware of these associations  
  • keep discussions on time and focused  
  • ensure NHMRC procedures are followed  
  • assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them  
  • promote good engagement by peer reviewers in all discussions |
- ensure that all peer reviewers consider ‘relative to opportunity’, including career disruptions, when discussing applications
- ensure the discussion leads to an outcome where the applications are appropriately considered against the Partnership Projects Assessment Criteria (the assessment criteria, see Attachment D) using the Partnership Projects Category Descriptors (category descriptors, see Attachment E)
- ensure the panel consistently considers the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus
- ensure peer reviewers declare reasons for voting two or more away from the primary spokespersons score in any of the assessment criteria
- ensure the budget discussions are consistent for all applications and inform the Assistant Chair if inconsistencies arise
- ensure all information recorded is consistent with that recorded by the Assistant Chair and NHMRC Secretariat
- through NHMRC’s Granting System endorse comments of the review and scoring of applications
- ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of discussions for each application
- record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice.

### Panel Assistant Chair (Assistant Chair)

Prior to the panel meeting the Assistant Chair will:
- familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel
- rigorously assess the proposed budgets for high scoring applications identified in the initial assessments that do not require discussion at a panel meeting
- consider comments and advice from Spokespersons and Expert Peer Reviewers and the Direct Research Costs Guidelines on the NHMRC website when assessing Personal Support Packages, Direct Research Costs and equipment requests
- liaise with the relevant spokesperson and recommend appropriate reductions where the proposed budget is in excess of that required to accomplish the research objectives
- consider the relevance and justification for the in-kind support and the Partner Contribution Guidelines at Appendix B of the Partnership Projects 2019 Guidelines when assessing budgets.

During the panel meeting the Assistant Chair will:
- record the strengths and weaknesses of the application while discussion is underway by the panel
- facilitate the panel discussions of application budgets and record a comprehensive rationale for proposed budget review (if relevant)

### Peer reviewers

Prior to the panel meeting Peer Reviewers will:
- familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel
- provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Partnership Projects assessment criteria for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner
- assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements ‘relative to opportunity’, including any career disruptions, where applicable
- consider the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* provided for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus

During the panel meeting peer reviewers will:
- prepare for and participate in the discussion for each relevant application, including budget discussions where applicable
- provide a score for each assessment criteria against the Category Descriptors for each application
- review discussions of applications to ensure equity between applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Primary Spokesperson (1SP)</strong></th>
<th>Peer Reviewers may be appointed as Primary Spokesperson for applications allocated to the panel.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior to the panel meeting 1SPs will:</strong></td>
<td>review the allocated application against the assessment criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide initial scores and budget recommendations of the allocated application using the category descriptors as a guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide initial comments which may be provided to the applicant as feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prepare speaking notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During the panel meeting 1SPs will:</strong></td>
<td>lead the panel discussion on the competitiveness of the application and the significance and merit of the proposed research against the aims, objectives and assessment criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide detailed advice to the panel of career disruptions claimed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ensure any productivity relative to opportunity considerations highlighted in the application are considered</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scrutinise the proposed budget to ensure that all requests are appropriate and fully justified</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide final scores against each assessment criteria based on panel discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>if required, assist the Secondary Spokesperson in discussion on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the requested budget</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide details feedback, reflecting panel discussions, which will be provided to the applicant</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)</strong></th>
<th>Peer Reviewers may be appointed as Secondary Spokesperson for applications allocated to the panel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior to the panel meeting 2SPs will:</strong></td>
<td>review the allocated application against the assessment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide initial scores, comments and budget recommendations of the allocated application using the category descriptors as a guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prepare speaking notes and a recommendation for the panel to either leave the requested budget intact, propose modifying the budget, or seek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the panel meeting 2SPs will:

- support the application discussion on the competitiveness of the application and the significance and merit of the proposed research against the aims, objectives and assessment criteria
- provide final scores against each assessment criteria based on panel discussions
- if required, present an evaluation and lead the discussion of the appropriateness of the proposed budget
- present a recommendation for the panel to either: leave the requested budget intact, propose modifying the budget, or seek advice from the panel regarding specific budget requests

| Expert Peer Reviewer (EPR) | Peer Reviewers may be appointed as Expert Peer Reviewers for applications allocated to the panel. This role is only required as part of the initial assessment, EPRs will take on the same role as Peer Reviewers during the panel meeting.
Prior to the panel meeting EPRs will:
- review the allocated application against the assessment criteria
- provide initial scores and comments of the allocated application using the category descriptors as a guide |

| Senior NHMRC Staff | NHMRC staff with appropriate expertise may be involved in:
- reviewing allocation of applications and peer reviewers to panels
- assisting and advising on the peer review process. |

| NHMRC Staff | Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities, including:
Prior to the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:
- approach potential peer reviewers and Chairs
- rule on level of declared CoIs
- act as the first point of contact for Peer Reviewers
- provide briefings to Peer Reviewers
- determine eligibility of applications
- assign applications and Peer Reviewers to the appropriate panel
- prepare provisional ranked lists.
During the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:
- support the operation of NHMRC’s Granting System
- assist the Chair in running the discussions
- manage the CoI process, including maintaining accurate records, ensuring all participants (including community observers) are aware of all declared CoIs
- ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application
- maintain scoring records for each application
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community |
observers
- seek feedback from Chairs, peer reviewers and community observers on improvements for future processes.

| Indigenous Health Research Peer reviewers | Indigenous Health Research Peer Reviewers will:
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                          | review the relative strength of each application in terms of how well it addresses NHMRC’s Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Attachment F).

| Community Observers | During the panel meeting observers will:
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | identify and advise the Chair of all real or perceived conflicts they have with applications to be discussed
|                     | monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting
|                     | provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across meetings.

Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff.

### 3.3 Reviewing Partnership Projects applications

All Partnership Projects applications are assessed against the Partnership Projects Assessment Criteria (Attachment D) using the Partnership Projects Category Descriptors as a guide (Attachment E). Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 3.3.1) are also assessed against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria as set out at Attachment F.

#### 3.3.1 Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ health will be identified by information provided in the application. Researchers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will confirm that these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria from an assessor with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Applications for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research Special Initiative will be assessed by the panel using the same peer review process as all other Partnership Project applications.

#### 3.3.2 Identification of Cols and peer reviewer suitability

Peer Reviewers will be provided with an overview of applications within NHMRC’s Granting System, and will declare their Cols in accordance with the guidelines provided at Section 2.3 and Attachment B.

Some peer reviewers may have a Col for which they require a ruling. For these, NHMRC will assess the information in the declaration made by the assessor and specify a level of peer review participation in NHMRC’s Granting System.

Peer reviewers are required to include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate Col assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. If the Chair or a peer reviewer is uncomfortable with a ruling level, they can raise this with NHMRC staff and request a review.
CoIs must be declared at the beginning of the peer review process. However, CoIs must be declared at any stage of the peer review process if new conflicts become apparent. Any reviewer that declares, or has a 'high' Col ruling, will not be able to participate in the review of that application, but they can provide scientific advice, on request from the Chair, if required.

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of assessor suitability for applications, based on the information available to them in the application summary.

Taking into account CoIs and assessor suitability, peer reviewers will be assigned to applications.

3.3.3 Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (with which they have no high CoIs) and will be required to review and subsequently enter their scores via NHMRC’s Granting System. Peer reviewers will refer to the Partnership Projects Assessment Criteria and associated category descriptors.

Peer reviewers should not discuss applications with other peer reviewers. This is to ensure peer reviewers provide completely independent scores.

Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create a provisional ranked list of applications to determine applications that will not proceed to panel review.

For all applications, the following should be considered during the review and subsequent scoring, where applicable.

3.3.3.1 Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Panel members must take into account productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations in the assessment of all applications. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions are provided at Attachment G.

3.3.3.2 Industry-relevant experience

Peer reviewers should appropriately recognise an applicant's industry-relevant experience and outputs. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, a Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience is available on the NHMRC website.

3.3.3.3 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers should take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field, when assessing the publication component of an applicant's track record. Track record assessment should take into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of all of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published.

It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors or the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List when assessing applications.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) makes recommendations for improving the evaluation of research assessment. NHMRC is a signatory of DoRA and adheres to the recommendations, as outlined in DoRA, for its peer review processes.

3.3.3.4 Initial Assessments

Peer reviewers assigned as Spokespersons (SPs) and Expert Peer Reviewers (EPRs) for each application will consider the research proposal in conjunction with any additional assessments. They
will be asked to assess the application against the assessment criteria and score them using the category descriptors. SPs and EPRs enter scores into NHMRC’s Granting System and comment on the requested budget. The 1SP is also required to provide comments in NHMRC’s Granting System against the assessment criteria to justify their evaluation.

The 1SP comments entered at this stage may be provided to an applicant if the application is categorised as non-competitive or a high scoring application. NHMRC will not preview comments, therefore peer reviewers must ensure their comments do not contain inappropriate or defamatory remarks. For further guidance on completing the assessment see Attachment H.

### 3.3.3.5 Applications requiring further discussion identified

Following initial scoring of applications against the Assessment Criteria, the five initial scores will be used to calculate an initial rating. Applications that receive an overall score of 4.500 and below will be deemed least competitive and will not proceed to further peer review.

Applications that receive a minimum mean score of 5.000 in each criterion will be deemed high scoring applications and may exit the peer review process at this stage to be recommended for funding. If this occurs, budget comments from SPs and EPRs will be reviewed by the Assistant Chair. The Assistant Chair will consider elements of the budget, and the budget justification and provide advice on the appropriate final budget for the application. Where the SPs and EPRs deem the proposed budget is in excess of that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended. For further information refer to Direct Research Cost guidelines on the NHMRC website.

Remaining applications will be identified as requiring further discussion and will progress to the panel meeting.

When making budget recommendations, SPs and EPRs should consider whether the Partner Organisations that provide in-kind support have justified how the in-kind support is substantive, meaningful and relevant to the project. Partner Contribution Guidelines are available at Appendix F of the Partnership Projects 2019 Guidelines.

NHMRC will advise applicants if their application was found to be non-competitive and advise the PRP which applications will be discussed at the panel meeting.

### 3.3.4 Panel meetings

Partnership Projects panel meetings will occur via videoconference.

NHMRC secretariat staff will coordinate the timing of panel meetings.

#### 3.3.4.1 At the panel meeting

A briefing for panel members will be held before discussion of applications commence. The briefing will provide an opportunity for members to ask questions and clarify matters relating to the peer review process. Panel members will be invited to describe their expertise and previous experience of the Partnership Projects scheme or other NHMRC peer review processes. During their introductions, panel members will be asked to declare any associations with other panel members including:

- Former student/teacher/mentoring relationships.
- Common employment/institutional associations.
- Other associations that may, or may not, be seen to impair fair and impartial judgement.
This information is sought for the benefit of panel members who may raise concerns arising from declarations with NHMRC staff.

**Quorum**

Each application must be reviewed by a quorum of panel members. Quorum is defined as one member more than half of the total number of voting members on the panel (exceptions to this may occur in special circumstances).

For all applications proceeding to panel discussion the following will occur.

### 3.3.4.2 Application announced (~2 minutes)

The Chair will:

- Announce the application title, institution, chief investigators and associate investigators.
- Identify Members who have previously declared a CoI with the application. Those Members leave the meeting if their CoI prevents them from participating in the assessment of the application under discussion.
- Invite Members to declare if they have identified a new CoI with the application. If a member declares a new CoI, or wishes to discuss any concerns related to an existing CoI, the PRP Member must declare the nature of the interest to the PRP. The PRP will then decide as a group whether the PRP Member should be precluded from review of the application. The Chair is responsible for facilitating discussion and ensuring a decision is made. The details of the late CoI will be recorded by the Chair, Assistant Chair and NHMRC Secretariat.
- If a new CoI is declared at the PRP meeting by a 1SP or 2SP, which prevents them from participating in the assessment of the application, a new 1SP or 2SP will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial Spokesperson will be discarded. Discussion of the application will be delayed to give the new Spokesperson time to prepare.
- Ensure that the Additional Expert is ready to participate (for applications that have had an Additional Expert appointed).
- Once highly conflicted members have left the meeting, the Chair name the Spokespersons and announce the Spokespersons scores.

### 3.3.4.3 Primary Spokesperson comments on application (~6 minutes)

The 1SP will:

- Provide a concise summary of the grant proposal and highlight its scientific strengths and weaknesses. The 1SP will assume that PRP Members are familiar with documentation relating to the application.
- Ensure that relevant considerations (e.g. Track Record Relative to Opportunity, Career Disruptions) are outlined in their discussion.
- Only make reference to the budget in relation to the feasibility of the research proposed under budget constraints.

### 3.3.4.4 Secondary Spokesperson comments on application (~4 minutes)

The 2SP will:

- Briefly highlight their agreement/disagreement with the 1SP comments.
- Ensure that relevant considerations (e.g. Track Record Relative to Opportunity, Career Disruptions) are taken into account.
- Only make reference to the budget in relation to the feasibility of the research proposed under budget constraints.
3.3.4.5 Panel discussion (~5 minutes)

PRP Members have the opportunity to ask questions of both Spokespersons and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are taken into account. EPRs may disclose their initial scores however this is not mandatory. The Chair must ensure adequate review of the application occurs, that all members get a fair opportunity to comment and no member exerts undue influence over others.

3.3.4.6 Scoring (~3 minutes)

Spokespersons are permitted to change their scores after the full panel discussion. Therefore, following the PRP’s discussion, the Chair will ask the Spokespersons to confirm their scores for each of the four criteria. EPRs may also change their scores, however they are not required to announce their revised scores unless the score is two or more away from the 1SP.

The Chair will then invite PRP Members that intend to score two points or more away from the 1SP scores to explain their reasoning. The NHMRC Secretariat and Chair will record their justification.

All PRP Members in the meeting, excluding the Chair and Assistant Chair, will score the application. Scoring will be anonymous, that is panel members will not know one another’s individual scores with the exception of the Spokespersons. PRP Members will be asked to provide a score for each of the four assessment criteria using the seven-point scale. The category descriptors at Attachment E should be used to guide scoring. Collation of the members’ scores will be managed by the NHMRC Secretariat.

At the completion of scoring, NHMRC Secretariat will announce the rating for each criterion and the overall category score.

Rating - this will be determined by including each PRP Member’s score against each of the assessment criteria. The rating will take account of the weighting of each criterion and be calculated to three decimal places.

Category Score - this will be determined based on the calculated rating, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating range</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.001 - 1.500</td>
<td>Category 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.501 - 2.500</td>
<td>Category 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.501 - 3.500</td>
<td>Category 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.501 - 4.500</td>
<td>Category 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.501 - 5.500</td>
<td>Category 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.501 - 6.500</td>
<td>Category 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.501 - 7.000</td>
<td>Category 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applications recommended for funding must achieve minimum mean scores of 4.000 in all four assessment criteria.

The Chair, Assistant Chair and NHMRC Secretariat will record the scores. Where members are uncertain or have concerns regarding the final score, the Chair should invite further discussion. If any member still disagrees with the outcome, members will be invited to re-score the application.
3.3.4.7 Budget Discussion – only if required (~5 minutes)

Applications that score Category 5 or above and that achieve minimum mean scores of 4.000 in all four assessment criteria will trigger a budget discussion. Exceptions include:

- Applications relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research which require a Category score of 4 or above. These applications must also achieve a minimum mean score of 4.000 in all four assessment criteria.
- Applications that address the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FASD and Obesity Prevention Research Special Initiative which require a Category score of 4 or above.

The budget discussion will commence after voting is completed. The 2SP will lead the budget discussion, facilitated by the Assistant Chair. The PRP will consider elements of the budget, and the budget justification, then provide advice on an appropriate final budget for the application. Where the PRP deems the proposed budget is in excess of that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended. For further information refer to Direct Research Costs guidelines on the NHMRC website.

When making budget recommendations, PRP Members should consider whether the partners that provide in-kind support have justified how the in-kind support is substantive, meaningful and relevant to the project. Partner Contribution Guidelines are available at Appendix F of the Partnership Projects 2019 Guidelines.

The Chair, Assistant Chair and NHMRC staff will record budget recommendations determined by the PRP. The Chair will endorse and verify that the budget recommendations have been recorded correctly.

3.3.5 Reconciliation

At the end of the deliberations, a reconciliation of applications reviewed will take place. This process gives PRP Members a final opportunity to raise any concerns regarding applications that have been reviewed throughout the meeting.

Where a PRP Member believes an application may have been reviewed in an inconsistent manner, they should raise the matter with the PRP Chair. NHMRC Secretariat will ensure that members with high CoIs leave the meeting before any details of the application and the circumstances of concern are outlined to the panel.

In the event that an application needs to be reassessed the application will be reopened for discussion and rescored by the panel at the next opportunity.

The Chair may also revisit budget discussions at the end of the meeting to ensure consistency was achieved.

3.3.6 Finalise feedback to applicants

PRP Members are requested to use this time to review initial comments made in relation to applications they have been assigned as 1SP. Where necessary, changes should be made to ensure the comments reflect the final scoring by the panel. Once finalised, these comments will be provided to applicants as feedback following outcome announcements. For further guidance on completing the assessment see Attachment H.

3.3.7 Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a Condition of Funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a
rare event. When this does occur, the panel will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and support conditions that are unambiguous and able to be assessed should a condition be necessary.

CoFs relate to the awarding of funding, the continuation of funding or the level of funding. They do not relate to conditions which affect either eligibility to apply or subsequent peer review.

The principles are:
- NHMRC seeks to minimise the administrative burden on researchers and Administering Institutions.
- CoFs must not relate to the competitiveness of an application (e.g. project requires more community engagement); these issues should be considered during peer review, and be reflected in the scores for the application.
- Any CoFs must be clear and measurable, so that the condition can be readily assessed as having been met.

### 3.3.8 Panel documentation

Peer reviewers must retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until the outcomes of the panel’s deliberations are finalised. For panel meetings, this is when the final scores have been determined. After this time, notes both hard copy and electronic should be disposed of appropriately.

### 3.3.9 Funding recommendation

After the panel meeting/s, application scores from all panels are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations.

### 3.3.10 Notification of outcomes

Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary. The Application Assessment Summary will include scores and comments against each of the assessment criteria.
Attachment A - Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

Fairness

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and honest and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the NHMRC website. All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website or via GrantConnect.
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.4

Independence

- The order of merit determined by peer review panels is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded ‘below the funding line’ in priority or strategic areas.
- Panel Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application before that panel. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC’s processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

Appropriateness and balance

- Peer reviewers are selected to meet the program’s objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that panels are constituted to ensure an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

Confidentiality

- Peer reviewers are bound to act in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 and the confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act. They must act in confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process.

4 Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.
- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.

- NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

**Impartiality**

- Peer reviewers must declare all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect their judgement on particular applications.

- Panel members must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, or with grants being reviewed by other panel members, including:
  - research collaborators
  - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
  - employment arrangements
  - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, impair fair and impartial judgement.

- Conflicts of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in decision making on relevant applications.

**Quality and Excellence**

- NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its peer review processes.

- Any significant change will be developed in consultation with the research community and may involve piloting new processes in.

- NHMRC will strive to introduce new technologies that are demonstrated to maximise the benefits of peer review, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process while minimising individual workloads.

- NHMRC will undertake post-program assessment of all its schemes with feedback from the sector.

- NHMRC will provide advice, training and feedback for peer reviewers new to NHMRC peer review.

Where NHMRC finds peer reviewers to be substandard in their performance, NHMRC may provide such feedback directly to the reviewer or their institution.
Attachment B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Conflict of Interest

The following CoI Situations and Additional Guidance for Work and Professional CoI tables outline matters that may need to be considered when deciding the level of potential conflicts and provide some examples of specific situations where CoIs in the peer review process apply.

The tables are intended to be for guidance only. They are representative of CoI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The tables are provided to assist participants in the peer review process to identify the types of circumstances in which CoIs might arise, but are not intended to be checklists.

Note that CoIs relate to Chief Investigators – *not* Associate Investigators.

**CoI situations requiring further clarification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Explanations and examples</th>
<th>Conflict level*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application under review</td>
<td>You are a named participant on the application under review.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have had discussions/input into the study design or research proposal of this application.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations</td>
<td>You have actively collaborated re-publications (co-authorship), pending applications, existing NHMRC or other grants.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have an indirect collaboration e.g. collaborating co-worker, member of a research or discussion group, co-author of a large multi-author paper where involvement was minimal, provided cells/animals etc. to applicants without financial gain or exchange.</td>
<td>Obtain a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You are planning, or have been approached to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with this applicant(s).</td>
<td>Obtain a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working relationship</td>
<td>Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationship and/or interests</td>
<td>There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant’s partner or other member of their family.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teaching or supervisory relationship

For either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, you have taught or supervised the applicant; you co-supervised the applicant; your own research was supervised by the applicant.

**Conflict level**: High

### Financial interest in the application

- **You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide cells/animals or similar to the applicant.**

  **Conflict level**: Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC

- **You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company.**

  **Conflict level**: Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC

### Other interests or situations

- **You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier than the last five years).**

  **Conflict level**: High

*Indicative only. Experienced NHMRC staff will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict and, in doing so, will consider the particular circumstance of each potential conflict.*

### Additional Guidance for Work and Professional CoI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Explanations and examples</th>
<th>Conflict level*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Relationship</td>
<td>You have the same employer or are part of the same organisation</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work at the same independent Medical Research Institute (e.g. Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, The Garvan Institute of Medical Research etc.) or in the same University/Hospital Department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor or applicant holds a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work for the same institution but at different campuses and do not know each other</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work in the same faculty but in different schools/departments and do not know each other.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation</td>
<td>High - in most situations due to perceived CoI relating to potential financial benefit from showing favour towards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Professional relationships and interests | You work in the same locality but for a different organisation, i.e. Where an assessor works for a University and an applicant works for an affiliated Medical Research Institute (or vice versa), such as relationships between:  
- The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI); or  
- The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health. | When there is a direct association/collaboration between the assessor and applicant, where the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research. | High |
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc.</td>
<td>Where you hold a membership in which you may be perceived to have a vested interest, i.e. pecuniary or other direct interests with the proposed research, e.g. when another board/committee member is associated with the grant application (a member of the CI team or is Faculty/Department Head where the research is to be conducted.)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's organisation, i.e. where an assessor and an applicant work for different organisations that have active/ongoing collaborations or</td>
<td>Where there is a direct link/collaboration between the applicant and assessor, in which the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the assessor and applicant (e.g. researchers located at the University of Melbourne faculty that has no direct association/collaboration with applicant at WEHI).</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliations, such as affiliations between:</td>
<td>Collaboration between applicant and assessor (e.g. researcher located at the University of Melbourne and has no direct link/collaboration with individual at WEHI).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI), or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health, or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Schools of Health Sciences at two or more different universities, as part of a research or teaching collaboration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies etc. | When you or your institution has an affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have vested interest in this research e.g. a pharmaceutical company that has provided drugs to the applicants for testing. | High |

| | When you or your institution has an indirect affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research, e.g. you are employed at a large institution in an area distant from the organisation(s) in question. | Low |

*Indicative only. Experienced NHMRC staff will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict and, in doing so, will consider the particular circumstance of each potential conflict.*
Attachment C - Concerns Arising During Peer Review about Possible Research Misconduct

This advice is for researchers or others who have become concerned during NHMRC peer review assessment that research misconduct may have occurred. It helps peer reviewers understand the process for raising these concerns.

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) aims to promote high quality conduct in research and sets out responsibilities for institutions and staff when research misconduct occurs. You should already be familiar with Part A of the Code, which describes the principles and practices for encouraging responsible conduct for researchers and institutions.

Your role in peer review

Peer review is central to NHMRC’s strategy of investing in high quality health and medical research, building research capacity and supporting the best research and researchers.

The Code describes peer review as the impartial and independent assessment of research by others in the same or a related field. The Code also notes that peer review may play a role in drawing attention to deviations from the principles of the Code. Section 6.2 of the Code identifies the responsibilities of peer reviewers.

What should I do if I come across something that suggests research misconduct while reviewing a grant for NHMRC?

When you are undertaking peer review for NHMRC, you might have concerns, for example, about items in a publications list, or potentially false or misleading statements, diagrams or figures. You could also have concerns about the behaviour of other peer reviewers.

Re-familiarise yourself with the Code

The first step should be to re-read the Code to make sure that you are clear about what you believe is wrong. Definitions of research misconduct can be found on page 10.1.

Part A of the Code provides advice on how to manage research data and materials, how to publish and disseminate research findings (including proper attribution of authorship), how to collaborate across institutions, how to manage conflicts of interest as well as obligations in peer review.

The second step should be to read NHMRC’s Grant Guidelines that address issues about incomplete, false or misleading applications.

How should I report my concerns if I believe research misconduct may have occurred?

If you believe research misconduct may have occurred you should raise your concerns with NHMRC. The process depends on the peer review stage the application is at when your concerns arise:

- If Peer Review Panel meetings have not yet begun, you should contact the relevant secretariat using the funding program or panel-specific email address.

- If Peer Review Panel meetings are underway, you should raise the issue in a side discussion with the panel Chair, secretariat and/or the director of the relevant funding program.

Where appropriate, the relevant NHMRC director will then refer the matter to NHMRC’s Ethics and Integrity section, which will consider the concerns and, where appropriate, contact the research institution involved. It is important to note that NHMRC does not conduct its own investigation into
allegations. As per the Code, this is the responsibility of the relevant institution. However, NHMRC will liaise with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation and take any necessary precautionary or consequential actions under the NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding.

It is important that you document your concerns clearly and precisely to assist NHMRC in providing specific information to the relevant research institution.

**Should I raise these issues in my assessment report or in panel discussion?**

As an assessor, your assessment report or contribution to panel discussions should not refer to any concerns related to research integrity. Assessment comments can and should comment on or seek clarification on all aspects of the application without implying concerns with the integrity of the application or applicant. These concerns should be raised through a separate process while the application continues to progress through the peer review process. For example, as an assessor it would be appropriate to query statistics in an application that appear to be incorrect. This gives the applicant an opportunity to clarify or correct the matter in schemes that allow for rebuttal. However, it is not appropriate in assessment reports to suggest that an apparent error or inconsistency is indicative of research misconduct.

The NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding ensures that mechanisms are in place to consider any unresolved research misconduct allegations prior to the release of funding. For example, a condition could be placed on a grant preventing the commencement of funding until after the resolution of the matter, with funding potentially being withheld if research misconduct is proven.

Since allegations are investigated by institutions, NHMRC may need to provide written material on the nature of the concerns. We will not reveal your identity to the institution without your consent and will strive to maintain the anonymity of peer reviewers.

**What if I am still not satisfied?**

If you do not believe your concerns have been adequately dealt with through this process, you can raise your concerns with the Ethics and Integrity Team by emailing integrity@nhmrc.gov.au who can provide you with further advice.
Attachment D – Partnership Projects Assessment Criteria

Applications for NHMRC Partnership Projects will be assessed against the following criteria (percentage values of the total score are provided in brackets):

1. Track Records of the Chief Investigators, Partner Organisations and Partner Investigators, Relative to Opportunity (25%)
2. Scientific Quality of the Proposal and Methodology (25%)
3. Relevance and Likelihood to Influence Health and Research Policy and Practice (25%)
4. Strength of Partnership (25%)

Category Descriptors for these Assessment Criteria are at Attachment E.

The research question or problem that the Partner Organisation(s) need answered or solved must be clearly stated in the application and in the letters of support from Partner(s). This is required to aid in the assessment of the application.

Criterion One

Track Records of the Chief Investigators, Partner Organisations and Partner Investigators, Relative to Opportunity (25%)

Chief Investigators

It is expected that researchers named as Chief Investigators will have an excellent record of achievement and encompass a broad spectrum of achievements, including but not limited to:

- a record of having worked successfully with policy and/or practice organisations
- demonstrable effects of previous research on health care practices and policy
- other related service achievements (such as research development, health or clinical policy or practice and influential advice to health care authorities)
- books and other relevant forms such as government reports
- publications in peer-reviewed journals
- invitations to present work nationally or internationally
- previous funding relative to opportunity (e.g. from NHMRC, other Australian peer-reviewed sources, other Australian funding, international peer-reviewed funding and private sector funding)

Partner Organisations and Partner Investigators

Partner Organisations and named Partner Investigators will be assessed by the peer review panel. Up to half of the criterion weighting will be determined by the experience and relevance of the Partner Organisation and Partner Investigators to the research proposal.

Partner Organisations will be assessed for relevance to the research proposal. It is expected that
partner Organisations named on an application have:

- the capacity to use the findings to influence policy decision making and health system performance. This will be assessed by reference to, for example, the roles and/or areas of responsibility of the organisation or the partner organisation’s demonstrated record of achievement in effecting such changes
- experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health programme or health service
- expectations that align with the goals of the CI team

The inclusion of at least one named Partner Investigator from the policy and/or practice partner organisation is mandatory, and Partner Investigators will be assessed and expected to be awarded up to half of the criterion weighting when assessed by the peer review panel.

The assessment of these ‘Partner Investigators’ will be on the basis of:

- relevant experience and authority to support the partnership
- demonstrated evidence of leadership in the relevant field
- experience of translating research findings into policy and/or practice
- demonstrated evidence of successfully implementing change in a field relevant to the proposal

Note: It is recognised that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions will be considered when assessing research output and track record.

**Criterion Two**

*Scientific Quality of the Proposal and Methodology (25%)*

Assessment of scientific quality will include the following considerations:

- the clarity of hypotheses and objectives
- strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design and/or the appropriateness and the robustness of the proposed methodology
- feasibility
- demonstrated commitment to service delivery
- must be research focused on translating evidence into policy and practice or evaluating current policy and practice and identifying gaps in knowledge
Criterion Three

Relevance\(^5\) and Likelihood to Influence Health and Research Policy and Practice (25%)

Assessment will focus on the extent to which the findings from the research are likely to make a significant contribution to influencing health and wellbeing through changes in the delivery, organisation and funding of services that affect health. This will include consideration of factors such as the extent to which:

- the aims and concepts of the project are innovative
- the project is likely to yield new methods and techniques for addressing issues
- the project has the potential to contribute significantly to health policy and decision making
- the capacity of the partner organisation(s) to use the findings to influence policy decision making and health system performance. This will be assessed by reference to, for example, the roles and/or areas of responsibility of the organisation or the partner organisation's demonstrated record of achievement in effecting such changes
- the application addresses issues which are of national or regional significance in improving health or health care

Criterion Four

Strength of Partnership (25%)

Assessment will focus on the extent to which the application demonstrates the capacity to develop and/or sustain a strong partnership. Factors such as the following will be considered:

- evidence of co-development of the proposal
- the cash and/or in-kind commitment of the partner(s)
- the roles of staff in the partner agency or agencies in the research process
- previous evidence of effective working relationships with partner organisations
- the proposed governance or partnership arrangements
- shared decision making/leadership

Applications should show how the team will foster and maintain a collaborative approach between the researchers and decision makers, over the course of the initiative.

In evaluating the strength of the partnership, applications will be assessed on the extent to which the proposal is achievable through the provision of skills, linkages, infrastructure and milestones. NHMRC will also take into account value for money in terms of justification for equipment and facilities and other items of expenditure to sustain the partnership.

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\(^5\) Relevance is the extent to which the application addresses the needs of the health care system or an affected population.
The following table displays the category descriptors used to score an application against each of the four Assessment Criteria. Note that all criteria are of equal weighting. PRP members will provide a score (1-7, whole numbers only), for each of the four criteria listed below, for each grant application.

It is recognised that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions will be considered when assessing research output and track record.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Track records of the CIs, Partner Organisations and PIs, relative to opportunity (25%)</th>
<th>Scientific quality of the proposal and methodology (25%)</th>
<th>Relevance and likelihood to influence health policy and practice (25%)</th>
<th>Strength of the partnership (25%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7 Outstanding by International Standards | The CI team:  
- has a record of achievement that places them in the top 10% of peers/cohort  
- demonstrate extensive experience and success in collaborative research, evaluation and implementation of evidence into health policy, health practice and/or service delivery  
- demonstrate extensive experience working in partnership with health service providers or health policy agencies  
- have been stellar, in terms of publications, grants and other awards/recognition  
- have strong national and international reputations  
- hold leadership positions in highly regarded scientific or professional societies  
- have track records that are highly relevant to the proposed research.  

The Partner Organisation(s):  
- is highly relevant to the proposed | The Research proposal:  
- objectives are well-defined, highly coherent and strongly developed  
- builds on knowledge gained through previous research  
- is a near flawless design  
- is without question highly feasible  
- introduces major advances in concept of translational research  
- includes rigorous translational research design  
- uses best practice in implementation science methods including: the use of theoretical frameworks, justifiable, robust measures for monitoring and evaluation; best practice models for changing practice and behaviour modification; rigorous engagement plans and identified champions; policy change and influencing mechanisms; and long-term sustainability strategies. | The proposed outcomes:  
- address one (or more) health issue(s) of national or regional significance  
- translate demonstrated knowledge  
- will translate into fundamental outcomes in the knowledge-base, policy and/or practice of clinical medicine, public health or fundamental changes in health policy  
- will be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national meetings  
- will almost certainly result in highly influential publications  
- most likely become highly integrated into a health system or clinical practice, with minimal ongoing follow-up  
- have a high likelihood of becoming a highly effective, generalisable model that will prove to be beneficial to the health system  
- will receive high-profile coverage from media and the public in general | The proposed partnership:  
- demonstrates that a strong relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) already exists or will be developed  
- demonstrates existing shared governance and decision making capability.  
- can be used as an exemplar for what successful partnerships could achieve in terms of creating leaders, leverage, networking and delivering policy and practice developments in health  
- contributes to a high degree of team integration and cohesiveness  
- shows high probability for excellent collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas, Australia and internationally  
- is clearly evident from the conceptual stages of the proposal to the final application, as the partners are highly integrated into the proposal.  
- would see the partners involved at all stages of development in the proposal  
- is shown by shared policy/practice |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Requires</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrates extensive experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service</td>
<td>has objectives that have clear intent and logic</td>
<td>addresses a health issue of major importance of national or regional significance</td>
<td>demonstrates that a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) already exists or will be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has strong national and international reputations</td>
<td>is appropriate for the experience level of the applicant and team</td>
<td>is likely to be integrated into a health system or clinical practice, with some level of follow-up, and is integrated into current practice behaviours</td>
<td>demonstrates shared governance and decision making capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has clear expectations that align with the goals of the CI team</td>
<td>is excellent in design</td>
<td>will be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national meetings</td>
<td>is evident from the conceptual stages of the proposal to the final application, as the involvement of the partners are mostly integrated into the proposal. This proposal is therefore co-developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is highly likely to integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice, with minimal ongoing follow-up.</td>
<td>is highly feasible</td>
<td>will lead to highly influential publications</td>
<td>shows that the project plan was developed by a collaborative process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| is well placed to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and facilitate high uptake at all levels. | is innovative with respect to the question being addressed and the approach to it | includes most aspects of research translation that will assist the project. These aspects may include: research | ![](/image)

PI(s):
- demonstrates extensive experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service
- Demonstrates previous strong successful relationships with researchers.
- will generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development.
- illustrates capacity building, networking and infrastructure building activities that will extend beyond the life of the project.
- has a record of achievement that places them in the top 10-20% of peers/cohort
- are recognised for their experiences and successes in collaborative projects focussed on the design, research, evaluation and implementation of evidence into health policy, health practice and/or service delivery
- demonstrate experience working in partnership with health service providers or health policy agencies
- have track records that are very relevant to the proposed research
- addresses a health issue of major importance of national or regional significance
- is likely to be integrated into a health system or clinical practice, with some level of follow-up, and is integrated into current practice behaviours
- will be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national meetings
- likely to result in highly influential publications
- demonstrates that a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) already exists or will be developed
- demonstrates shared governance and decision making capability
- is evident from the conceptual stages of the proposal to the final application, as the involvement of the partners are mostly integrated into the proposal. This proposal is therefore co-developed
- shows that the project plan was developed by a collaborative process
- are well recognized for their contribution to their field of research
- have established national and growing international reputations
- have established positions of leadership, or are emerging leaders in their field
- hold leadership positions in well-regarded scientific or professional societies.

The Partner Organisation(s):

- is highly relevant to the proposed research
- demonstrates experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service
- has strong national reputations.
- has clear expectations that align with the goals of the CI team
- is highly likely to integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice
- is well placed to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and facilitate high uptake.

PI(s):

- demonstrates experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service
- Demonstrates previous successful relationships with researchers.

- design using implementation science frameworks, measures, monitoring and evaluation; models of change practice and behaviour modification; engagement plans and champions; policy change and influence; and long-term sustainability strategies.
- have a likelihood of becoming a highly effective, generalisable model that will prove to be beneficial to the health system
- have high levels of engagement and support from stakeholders
- have uptake at all levels and receive high-profile coverage from media and the public in general
- contribute to a high degree of involvement of end-users and the wider community
- generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development
- contribute to translating knowledge and research output into practice in at least one area of health
- will receive some accolades and recognition.

- is reflected in the likelihood that the project will build capacity to do or use research within the partner or the target decision making organisations
- is shown by shared policy/practice goals and appropriate cash and/or in-kind resource contributions
- clearly illustrates how the systems established will contribute to a high probability of being sustainable
- shows high probability for excellent collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and Australia.
<p>| 5 Very Good |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| shows a record of achievement that places them well above average of their peers/cohorts |
| are populated with some expertise in research translation in policy/practice/implementation, health systems and service delivery |
| have track records that are relevant to the proposed research |
| are recognized for their contribution to their field of research |
| members have growing national reputations and their research appears frequently at national meetings. |
| The Partner Organisation(s): |
| is relevant to the proposed research |
| demonstrates experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service |
| has national and regional reputations |
| has expectations that align with the goals of the CI team |
| is likely to integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice |
| will have capacity to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and facilitate uptake. |
| PI(s): |
| demonstrates experience and some success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service |
| Demonstrates previous relationships with researchers. |
| has clear objectives |
| raises only minor concerns regarding study design |
| will likely be successfully achieved |
| contains at least one innovative idea |
| includes several aspects of research translation that will assist the project. These aspects may range from: research design using implementation science frameworks, measures, monitoring and evaluation; models of change practice and behaviour modification; engagement plans and champions; policy change and influence; and long-term sustainability strategies. |
| addresses a health issue of considerable significance |
| will most likely be integrated into clinical practice, at least in localised areas |
| could be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national specialty meetings |
| may result in influential publications |
| may become a highly effective, generalisable model that will prove to be beneficial to the localised health arenas |
| will be feasible, although ongoing support from stakeholders will be required to ensure sustainability |
| will have support from some stakeholders |
| will require ongoing resourcing to ensure that the project is managed effectively |
| will contribute to translating knowledge and research output into practice in at least one area of health. |
| demonstrates that some relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) exists or will be developed |
| demonstrates potential shared governance and decision making capability |
| is evident in the final application, as the partners are involved in some key areas of the proposal, showing some co-development |
| shows good team integration and cohesiveness in terms of skills and experiences |
| is reflected in the likelihood that the project will build skills and capacity within the partner or the target organisations |
| shows some elements of shared policy/practice goals and resource contributions with an appropriate cash and/or in-kind balance |
| will grow and become sustainable if further resource commitments are found to embed the outcomes of the research for the long term |
| has articulated measures for integrating new researchers into teams |
| shows high probability for good collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• do show some expertise in research translation in policy/practice/implementation, health systems and service delivery</td>
<td>• is sound in terms of its objectives</td>
<td>• address a health issue of some importance</td>
<td>• demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist</td>
<td>• Demonstrates some shared governance and decision making capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have a solid record of achievement</td>
<td>• contains several areas of concern in the study design</td>
<td>• may have some novel aspects while others underpin or extend existing knowledge</td>
<td>• shows some team integration and cohesiveness in terms of skills and experiences</td>
<td>• shows some novel aspects and others underpin or extend existing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have track records that are relevant to the proposed research</td>
<td>• raises some concerns about successful completion/feasibility</td>
<td>• may result in some strong publications</td>
<td>• would be reasonably effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges</td>
<td>• may become sustainable if further resource commitments are found to embed the outcomes of the research for the long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have made contributions to the field of the proposal</td>
<td>• includes a brief mention of at least one aspect of research translation that will assist the project. These aspects may include: research design using implementation science frameworks, measures, monitoring and evaluation; models of change practice and behaviour modification; engagement plans and champions; policy change and influence; and long-term sustainability strategies.</td>
<td>• will most likely form a pilot study for implementation in the future</td>
<td>• is reflected in the likelihood that the project will build skills and capacity within the partner or the target organisations</td>
<td>• has articulated measures for integrating new researchers into teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have emerging national reputation albeit in a niche area.</td>
<td>• The Partner Organisation(s):</td>
<td>• will require significant support for its implementation</td>
<td>• shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support</td>
<td>• shows probability for some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is somewhat relevant to the proposed research</td>
<td>• demonstrates some experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service</td>
<td>• will need regular relationship management of the stakeholders to ensure that the momentum of the project is kept up</td>
<td>• may be sustainable if further resource commitments are found to embed the outcomes of the research for the long term</td>
<td>• has articulated measures for integrating new researchers into teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrates some experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service</td>
<td>• has a regional reputation</td>
<td>• will involve end-users and the wider community, although it may not be highly generalisable</td>
<td>• shows probability for some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.</td>
<td>• shows probability for some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has some expectations that align with the goals of the CI team</td>
<td>• may integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice will have some capacity to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and potentially facilitate uptake.</td>
<td>• will contribute to the knowledge base of the topic area.</td>
<td>• demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist</td>
<td>• demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• may integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice will have some capacity to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and potentially facilitate uptake.</td>
<td>PI(s):</td>
<td>• demonstrates experience in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service</td>
<td>• demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist</td>
<td>• demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrates previous relationships with researchers.</td>
<td>• Demonstrates previous relationships with researchers.</td>
<td>• Demonstrates previous relationships with researchers.</td>
<td>• shows probability for some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.</td>
<td>• shows probability for some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3 | Marginal | • members have published a number of works in a field relevant to this application in the last five years, but is less productive than might reasonably be expected  
• show limited expertise in research translation in policy/practice/implementation, health systems and service delivery  
• is deficient in some areas of expertise that will be required to successfully complete the proposed research  
• members have limited track records in the field of the proposed research. |
| 2 | Unsatisfactory | • shows several unsatisfactory objectives and is likely to only achieve a few of the objectives  
• contains many areas of significant concern in the study design  
• contains a research plan which does not seem to be feasible in several areas  
• only follows behind previously well documented and studied concepts or previously well used approaches  
• does not include any considerations into research translation strategies. |

|  |  | • addresses an issue of some importance to health  
• may extend existing knowledge  
• may result in some influential published research  
• will most likely form a pilot study for implementation in the future  
• will require significant work to engage stakeholders and ensure that the project is successful  
• will require significant modifications to the framework to ensure that its aims are generalizable other areas of health  
• has little involvement of end-users and the wider community. |

|  |  | • shows minimal team integration and cohesiveness in terms of skills and experiences  
• shows limited prospects for promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges  
• will provide limited capacity building/career development opportunities  
• shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support  
• is most likely unsuitable to achieve the goals of this project  
• shows minimal collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• is not productive to any significant extent in relevant fields</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not have the expertise or capacity to successfully complete more than a small fraction of the program of research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• members do not have relevant track records in the field of the proposed research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows weak objectives and the methodology is unlikely to achieve them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contains a study design which is inadequate in a number of areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• raises major concerns about the feasibility of the research plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is not innovative or significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• did not include any considerations into research translation strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not address an issue of concern to health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• will not advance current knowledge in the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is unlikely to result in any publications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has no involvement of end-users and the wider community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not show complementarity of skills and experiences, and how it would contribute to the success of the project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not show prospects for promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• will not provide capacity building/career development opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• will not achieve the goals of this project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows no collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rating** - The final rating will be determined by calculating the average of each voting member’s score for each of the four equally weighted Assessment Criteria. The final rating, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places, will then be used to give the deemed category.

**Category** - this will be deemed, based on the calculated rating, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating Range</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.501 – 7.000</td>
<td>Category 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.501 – 6.500</td>
<td>Category 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.501 – 5.500</td>
<td>Category 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.501 – 4.500</td>
<td>Category 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.501 – 3.500</td>
<td>Category 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.501 – 2.500</td>
<td>Category 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.001 – 1.500</td>
<td>Category 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment F - Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Qualifying applications must address the *NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as follows:

- **Community engagement** - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.

- **Benefit** - the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.

- **Sustainability and transferability** - the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.

- **Building capability** - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Panels will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, together with the scheme-specific assessment criteria (refer to the scheme-specific funding rules).
Attachment G – NHMRC Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline NHMRC’s Relative to Opportunity Policy with respect to peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. The audience is applicants and peer reviewers.

NHMRC’s objective is to support the best Australian health and medical research and the best researchers, at all career stages. NHMRC seeks to ensure that researchers with a variety of career experiences and those who have experienced pregnancy or a major illness/injury or have caring responsibilities, are not disadvantaged in applying for NHMRC grants.

Policy approach

NHMRC considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant’s track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including considering whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. It also means that applicants with career disruptions should not be disadvantaged (in terms of years since they received their PhD) when determining their eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants and that their Career Disruptions should be considered when their applications are being peer reviewed.

In alignment with NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review, particularly the principles of fairness and transparency, the following additional principles further support this objective:

- **Research opportunity**: Researchers’ outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and the research they conduct.

- **Fair access**: Researchers should have access to funding support available through NHMRC grant programs consistent with their experience and career stage.

- **Career diversity**: Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside of academia should not be disadvantaged. NHMRC recognises that time spent in sectors such as industry, may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

The above principles frame NHMRC’s approach to the assessment of a researcher’s track record during expert review of grant applications and eligibility of applicants applying for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. NHMRC expects that those who provide expert assessment during peer review will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers to be funded. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be very varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption considerations during peer review.

Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review of applications for funding

During peer review of applications, circumstances considered under the Relative to Opportunity Policy are:

- amount of time spent as an active researcher
- available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities
- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods that can impact on track record and productivity
• clinical, administrative or teaching workload
• relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact on research productivity
• for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including ‘sorry business’
• the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question
• research outputs and productivity noting time employed in other sectors. For example there might be a reduction in publications when employed in sectors such as industry
• carer responsibilities (that do not come under the Career Disruption policy below).

Career Disruption considerations during peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants

A Career Disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant’s capacity to work, due to:

• pregnancy
• major illness/injury
• carer responsibilities.

The period of career disruption may be used:

• to determine an applicant’s eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant
• to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
• for consideration by peer reviewers

To be considered for the purposes of eligibility and peer review, a period of Career Disruption is defined as:

• a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
• continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.6

Career Disruption and eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants

A Career Disruption can affect an applicant’s eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant. For such grants, the 10-year time limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.

Implementation

Information on how applicants can demonstrate their track record, Relative to Opportunity, for the purposes of peer review is available in NHMRC’s Granting System and in NHMRC’s Guide to Peer Review.

Information on how applicants can demonstrate that a Career Disruption(s) affects their eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant is also available in NHMRC’s Granting System and in the Investigator Grant Guidelines.

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6 For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a Career Disruption of 90 calendar days.
# Attachment H - Assessment Do’s and Don’ts

The table below provides further guidance to assist with preparing your assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Provide constructive feedback</td>
<td>- Provide ‘nil’ comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use the category descriptors associated with the assessment criteria and ensure they are addressed</td>
<td>- Provide inappropriate comments such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consider both the strengths and weaknesses for each Assessment Criterion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider:</td>
<td>Provide broad statements which suggest that the application is worthy or not worthy of funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Any Career Disruptions in detail and understand the longer term impact these have on scientific output</td>
<td>Bring into question the integrity of the research or researchers – any concerns regarding potential research misconduct must be raised with NHMRC separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing specific references if you think that the applicants have overlooked a relevant body of work</td>
<td>Question the eligibility of the applicant(s) and/or application – this should be raised with NHMRC separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether the research team has the capability to deliver on the proposed research</td>
<td>Provide scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The track record of all CIs, relative to opportunity (including career stage and/or career disruptions)</td>
<td>Consider that a topic is ineligible simply because the bulk of the work is being conducted in a particular setting (e.g. overseas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All aspects of the team’s output, including publications, translation of findings into policy or practice</td>
<td>Assess the CIA’s track record only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Citations of publications</td>
<td>Consider only individual aspects of a team member’s track record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evidence of co-development of the proposal</td>
<td>Dismiss career disruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The cash and/or in-kind commitment of the partner(s)</td>
<td>Use journal impact factors or person-centric citation metrics such as the H-index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The roles of staff in the partner agency or agencies in the research process</td>
<td>Simply ‘average’ the track record scores of the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Previous evidence of effective working relationships with partner organisations and</td>
<td>Penalize teams in which junior members are being mentored to contribute to the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The proposed governance or partnership arrangements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether the salary requests, direct research costs and equipment costs are necessary and fully justified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel Members must also:
- Declare all Conflicts of Interest (CoI) against each application
- Adhere to the principles of privacy and confidentiality
- Abide by relevant codes of conduct, and
- Notify NHMRC any concerns about eligibility.