



Partnership Projects 2024 Peer Review Guidelines

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Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
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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, guidelines and policies. 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, guidelines and policies
- how to disclose interests and manage conflicts, and
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

NHMRC will publicly notify the sector of any change in peer review process via its communications, such as through NHMRC's website and newsletters.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- Partnership Project 2024 grant guidelines, available on [GrantConnect](#), which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.
- [Policy on the Disclosure of Interests requirements for prospective and appointed NHMRC committee members](#) (Section 39 Committees). This Policy outlines peer reviewers' responsibilities to ensure all disclosures of interests are addressed in a rigorous and transparent way throughout the period of a peer reviewer's participation in NHMRC Committees.

2. Key changes

NHMRC recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's health and medical research community and has updated assessment processes to reflect these impacts.

Peer reviewers must follow these updated processes:

- In track record assessment, peer reviewers must consider COVID-19 related circumstances, as outlined by applicants, as part of career disruptions or other relative to opportunity considerations under the provisions of NHMRC's *Relative to Opportunity Policy*.
- Peer reviewers should note that applicants have been advised that they may include information on any potential significant and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their proposed research, and proposals for managing such risks, as part of their research risk management plan within the grant proposal.
- Peer reviewers are not to let the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proposed research affect the assessment of the research proposal of an application (e.g. the feasibility of accessing certain patient or population groups with social distancing restrictions in place).
- Peer reviewers must note that changes to the research proposal of a funded application, necessitated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. the commencement of a project needs to be delayed by six months until COVID-19 restrictions are eased) will be considered through NHMRC's Postaward management and grant variations processes. Such considerations do not form part of the peer review assessment of the proposal, particularly given that the long term impacts of the pandemic are still unknown.

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the Partnership Projects 2024 grant opportunity:

- The requirement to use gender-neutral language has been removed.
- The Community Engagement section of an applicant's Sapphire Profile will no longer be required.

- The Partnership Projects 2024 grant opportunity will have three Peer Review Cycles.

3. 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 peer reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

3.1. 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, Peer Review Mentors and Observers, where relevant.
- **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, in accordance with the obligations in the Funding Agreement.
- **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 disclosures of interest.
- **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 [Appendix A](#).

3.2. 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'.

The Code is supported by additional supplementary guidance, including [Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#).

3.3. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Peer Review

Information provided to generative artificial intelligence (such as natural language processing models and artificial intelligence technology tools) becomes part of a public database and may be accessed by third parties.

Peer reviewers must not input any part of a grant application, or any information from a grant application, into a natural language processing and/or artificial intelligence technology system to assist them in the assessment of applications.

Use of generative artificial intelligence may compromise the integrity of NHMRC's peer review process and be in

breach of its Principles of Peer Review, the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and the confidentiality undertaking of peer reviewers.

3.4. Disclosures of Interest

3.4.1. What is an interest?

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (made under the subsection 29(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2013* (PGPA Act)).

In particular, under section 29 of the PGPA Act, “an official of a Commonwealth entity who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest”. This obligation is ongoing and not limited to a particular point in time.

For the purposes of this document, the terms “material personal interest” and “interest” are regarded as interchangeable and whilst the term “interest/s” has been used for ease of reading, this policy includes guidance on each.

3.4.2. What is a Conflict of Interest (Col)?

A Col exists when there is a divergence between professional responsibilities (as a peer reviewer) and personal interests. Such conflicts have the potential to lead to biased advice affecting objectivity and impartiality. By managing any conflict, NHMRC maintains the integrity of its processes in the assessment of scientific and technical merit of the application.

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

- Involvement with the application under review
- Working relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Social relationships or associations
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Financial relationships or interests
- Other relevant interests or relationships

For further information, peer reviewers should consult the NHMRC [Policy on the Disclosure of Interests Requirements for Prospective and Appointed NHMRC Committee Members](#) (Section 39 Committees).

Researchers frequently have a Col 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.

An outline of potential Col situations and guidance is provided for peer reviewers at [Appendix B](#).

3.4.3. Disclosure of Interests in the Peer Review Process

Peer reviewers must identify and disclose interests they may have with any of the Chief Investigators (CIs) and Associate Investigators (AIs) on applications they will be reviewing. After appointment as a peer reviewer, but before assessing any applications, peer reviewers are required to disclose their interests in writing. While interests must be disclosed at the beginning of the peer review process, new or previously unrecognised interests must be disclosed at any stage of the peer review process. Declarations must include details that substantiate when collaborations occurred (i.e. month and year). NHMRC will use these details to verify and determine the level of conflict. Any peer reviewer who has an interest that is determined by NHMRC to be a ‘high’ Col will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of the Chair or NHMRC.

3.4.4. Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer's appointment under section 44B of the NHMRC Act (section 44B also covers failure to comply with section 29 of the PGPA Act).

It is important for peer reviewers to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process. Accordingly, peer reviewers are encouraged to consult the secretariat if they are uncertain about any disclosure of interest matter.

3.5. Freedom of Information (Fol)

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, the Fol process includes consultation and exemptions. NHMRC endeavours to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

3.6. Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the [NHMRC website](#).

4. Partnership Projects 2024 peer review process

4.1. Overview of the Partnership Projects 2024 peer review process

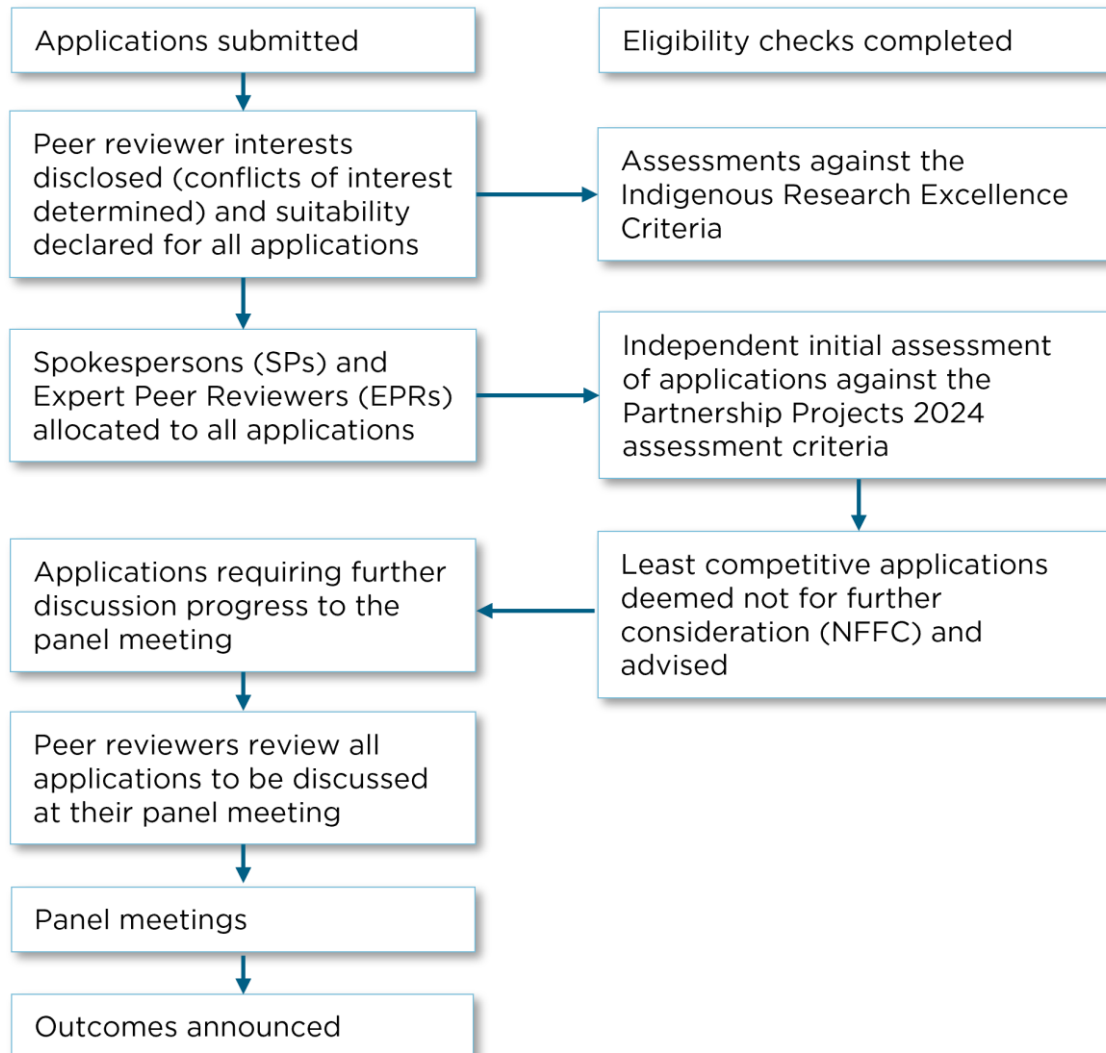


Table 1. Overview of the 2024 Partnership Projects grant opportunity key dates for peer review

PRC1	PRC2	PRC3	Activity
3 April 2024	7 August 2024	27 November 2024	Deadline for Partnership Projects 2024 application submission
April 2024	August 2024	December 2024	Application eligibility review and confirmation
April 2024	August 2024	December 2024	Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications
May 2024	September 2024	January 2025	Allocation of applications to peer reviewers
May 2024	September 2024	January 2025	Assessments against the <i>Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria</i>
May 2024	September 2024	January 2025	Initial panel briefing
May-June 2024	September-October 2024	January-February 2025	Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria for each allocated application
16-18 July 2024	19-21 November 2024	18-20 March 2025	Panel meeting
November 2024	March 2025	July 2025	Notification of outcomes*

*Date is indicative and subject to change.

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 4.3.

4.2. Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the Partnership Projects 2024 peer review process are identified below.

4.2.1. 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 do not assess applications but manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide.

Prior to the panel meeting Chairs need to:

- familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel
- familiarise themselves with ALL the applications assigned to their panel, excluding those for which they have been determined to have a high Col, and
- assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them.

During the panel meeting, Chairs will:

- take appropriate action for each Col

- keep discussions on time and focused
- ensure NHMRC procedures are followed
- 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 that any discussion and assessment is based on the Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors ([Appendices C and D](#))
- 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 are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of discussions for each application
- record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice, and
- approve Meeting Attendance Record sheets.

Chairs may need to:

- fulfil the duties and responsibilities of a peer reviewer where required (e.g., to meet quorum requirements of the panel when assessing particular applications) – in such an instance a substitute Chair will be identified for relevant applications.

4.2.2. Assistant Chair

Prior to the panel meeting Assistant Chairs need to:

- familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they may have with applications to be reviewed by the panel
- familiarise themselves with all applications being considered by the panel
- rigorously assess the proposed budgets for applications to be discussed at the panel meeting
- consider 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 D](#) of the *Partnership Projects 2024 Guidelines* when assessing budgets.

During the panel meeting Assistant Chairs will:

- note the strengths and weaknesses of the application while discussion by the panel is underway
- facilitate the panel discussions of application budgets
- record budget changes and panel justification for adjusting the proposed budgets
- ensure that budget discussions are consistent for all applications and inform the Chair if inconsistencies arise
- fulfil the duties and responsibilities of a peer reviewer where required (e.g. to meet quorum requirements of the panel when assessing particular applications), and
- liaise with the Chair in preparing a report on the effectiveness with which the panel performed its duties.

4.2.3. Peer Reviewers

Prior to the panel meeting, peer reviewers need to:

- familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel

- provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendices C and D) in a timely manner, for each non-conflicted application assigned
- 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* (Appendix E and F) provided for applications confirmed to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus.

During the panel meeting, peer reviewers will:

- disclose interests they have with other peer reviewers
- prepare for and participate in the discussion for each application where they do not have a high Col
- provide a score for each assessment criterion against the score descriptors for each application
- review discussions of applications to ensure equity between applications for consideration at the reconciliation stage of the panel meeting.

4.2.4. Primary Spokesperson (1SP)

Prior to the panel meeting:

- assess the allocated applications against the Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendices C and D)
- 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* (Appendix E) provided for applications confirmed to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus
- provide initial scores of the allocated application/s using the score descriptors as a guide
- provide initial comments which may be provided to the applicant as feedback
- prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting focusing on its key strengths and weaknesses

At the panel meeting:

- lead the discussion using prepared notes, considering research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, and the assessment provided against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria*, where applicable
- announce final scores for applications based on discussions
- support the secondary Spokesperson (2SP) in discussion about the appropriateness or otherwise, of the requested budget as required with reference to the individual elements of the budget ensuring Personnel Support Packages (PSPs), Direct Research Costs (DRCs) and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified
- after the panel meeting, provide detailed feedback reflecting panel discussions which will be provided to the applicant.

4.2.5. Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)

Prior to the panel meeting:

- assess allocated applications against the Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendices C and D).
- assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable
- provide initial scores, comments and budget recommendations of the allocated applications using the score descriptors as a guide

- prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting focusing on its key strengths and weaknesses
- rigorously assess the proposed budget to ensure that the budget requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified
- prepare 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.

At the panel meeting:

- 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 using prepared notes
- provide final scores for applications against each assessment criterion based on panel discussions
- if required, present an evaluation and lead the discussion of the appropriateness of the proposed budget, facilitated by the Assistant Chair
- 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.

4.2.6. Expert Peer Reviewer (EPR)

Peer reviewers may be appointed as EPRs 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:

- assess the allocated applications against the Partnership Project 2024 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors ([Appendices C and D](#)).
- for the initial assessment stage provide initial scores and comments on the allocated application/s using the score descriptors as a guide.

At the panel meeting:

- support the 1SP and 2SP in discussion with reference to prepared notes.

4.2.7. Indigenous health research peer reviewers

Indigenous health research peer reviewers will review how well each application addresses NHMRC's *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* ([Appendix E](#)) where applicable.

Indigenous health research peer reviewers will not participate in scoring. They will act as experts and provide guiding comments to the peer reviewers relating to the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria*. Indigenous health research peer reviewers may be invited to the panel meeting to discuss their comments about the criteria.

4.2.8. 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.

Prior to the panel meeting, NHMRC staff will:

- invite individuals to participate in the Partnership Projects 2024 scheme peer review process as required
- determine whether disclosed interests pose a conflict and the level of that conflict
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers
- provide briefings to peer reviewers
- determine eligibility of applications
- assign applications to the appropriate peer reviewers based on peer reviewers' declaration of interests and suitability
- prepare provisional ranked lists for peer reviewers' consideration.
- review peer reviewer written summaries for inappropriate comments.

At the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:

- support the operation of Sapphire
- assist the Chair in running the discussions
- fulfil the role of Chair/Assistant Chair where required (e.g. where the Chair/Assistant Chair is deemed to have a high conflict of interest with an application).
- implement appropriate management plans for peer reviewers with 'high' interests or conflicts with applications and ensure that all participants (including community observers) are aware of disclosed interests
- ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application, and assisting and advising on the peer review process as required
- maintain scoring records for each application
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers, and
- seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.

4.2.9. Community Observers

At the panel meeting, observers will:

- identify and advise the Chair of all interests they have with applications to be discussed
- monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting, and
- 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.

Observers are subject to the same disclosure of interest requirements as peer reviewers. Where a high Col exists, the observer will not observe discussions of the respective application(s).

4.3. Reviewing Partnership Projects 2024 applications

All Partnership Projects applications are assessed against the Partnership Projects 2024 assessment criteria and the associated score descriptors at [Appendices C and D](#). Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 4.3.1) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at [Appendix E](#).

4.3.1. Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health will be identified by information provided in the application. Peer reviewers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will check whether 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* ([Appendix E](#)) from an assessor with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. For further information on assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians, see *Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* at [Appendix F](#).

The assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* will be considered by peer reviewers when scoring the assessment criteria at [Appendix C](#).

4.3.2. Receipt and initial processing of applications

NHMRC staff will verify that Partnership Projects applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if

their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process.

4.3.3. Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with a summary of each application and disclose their interests within Sapphire, in accordance with the guidelines provided at section 3.4 and [Appendix B](#).

Some peer reviewers may have a disclosure of interest for which they require a decision. In this case, NHMRC will assess the information provided by the peer reviewer and provide a ruling on the level of Col.

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of suitability to assess each application, based on the information available to them in the application summary. Further information and tutorials are available from [Sapphire](#).

4.3.4. Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to peer reviewers

Considering Cols and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications and peer reviewers to panels. The number of panels formed will depend on the total number and type of applications received.

4.3.5. Briefing

NHMRC will provide peer reviewers briefing and supporting materials, as necessary, with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the Partnership Projects 2024 peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Additional information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process. Further information and tutorials are available from Sapphire.

4.3.6. Assessment of applications

Applicants named as a Chief Investigator are ineligible to participate in the peer review process and cannot be a member of the Peer Review Panel (Panel) for the Peer Review Cycle in which they are an applicant.

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high Col exists) and will be required to assess and enter their scores in Sapphire. Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the score descriptors, taking into account career disruptions and other '[relative to opportunity](#)' considerations, where applicable.

To ensure they provide independent scores, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers, except at the panel meeting.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores are completed by the nominated due date. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements.

Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create provisional ranked lists of applications to determine applications that will proceed to panel review. The overall score for each application will be determined using each peer reviewer's score for each of the assessment criteria. The overall score, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

4.3.6.1. Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must assess productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations, in the assessment of all applications. This reflects NHMRC's policy that peer reviewers should assess an applicant's track record of research productivity and professional contribution in the context of their career stage and circumstances, by taking into consideration whether the applicant's productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to them. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details of the *Relative to Opportunity Policy* are provided on [NHMRC's website](#).

4.3.6.2. Mitigating bias in peer review

NHMRC is raising peer reviewers' awareness of unconscious bias in the assessment process, in alignment with international practice and to ensure that NHMRC grant applications continue to receive objective and impartial assessments. Understanding bias enables peer reviewers' to critically and independently review applications and avoid suboptimal or unfair outcomes.

This is underpinned by NHMRC's document: [Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#), which states that peer reviewers should be aware of how their own biases (conscious or unconscious) could affect the peer review process, including in relation to gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional employer and research discipline.

To minimise or avoid bias, peer reviewers are encouraged to take action to address the unintended and systematic biases which prevent unprejudiced consideration of an application. To increase peer reviewers' awareness of the types of cognitive biases that can occur during peer review, NHMRC recommends the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) guidance on [Rethinking Research Assessment](#).

NHMRC is committed to its vision of a gender diverse and inclusive health and medical research workforce to take advantage of the full range of talent needed to build a healthy Australia. Fostering gender equity in peer review is a strategic objective underpinned by *NHMRC's Gender Equity Strategy*.

Peer reviewer participation in the online Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) for gender and science

In support of the objective, NHMRC encourages peer reviewers to complete the online IAT for gender and science. The IAT for gender and science, used by several research funding agencies nationally and internationally, is designed to help participants identify any implicit associations they may have between gender and participation in a science career.

By completing the test, peer reviewers gain a better understanding and increased awareness of how unconscious attitudes may affect their decisions, which prepares them to carry out their duties to the high standards of fairness and rigour expected by NHMRC. Peer reviewers should continue to follow all peer review principles and processes outlined in these guidelines, ensuring that each application is accurately reviewed against the assessment criteria ([Appendix C](#)). NHMRC does not have access to, nor does it seek, peer reviewers' information and results for the IAT for gender and science in the peer review process.

Peer reviewers must also familiarise themselves with any additional materials provided by NHMRC about unconscious bias awareness and implicit associations during the peer review process.

4.3.6.3. Industry-relevant experience

Peer reviewers are to recognise an applicant's industry-relevant experience and outputs. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, the *Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience* is provided at [Appendix G](#).

4.3.6.4. Assessment of the publication component of an applicant's track record

Peer reviewers are to consider 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 considers the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field 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. Journal-based metrics, if included by an applicant, should not be taken into consideration in the assessment of publications.

Instead, peer reviewers are to focus on the creativity and innovation of ideas, rigour of experimental design, appropriate use of statistical methods, reproducibility of results, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, all of which serve as surrogates for measuring research quality of a publication, irrespective of the field of research.

ONHMRC also encourages the use of research quality guidelines such as the Hong Kong Principles for assessing

researchers¹, which recommends focussing on responsible research practices, transparent reporting, open science, diversity of research and recognition of all contributions to research as hallmarks of publication quality.

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

4.3.6.5. Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

Peer reviewers are required to consider the general strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design of the proposal to ensure robust and unbiased results. Assessment of the experimental design should include consideration of the following, as appropriate:

- scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal)
- techniques to be used
- details for appropriate blinding (during allocation, assessment and analysis)
- strategies for randomisation
- details and justification for control groups
- effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study (where appropriate)
- consideration of relevant experimental variables, and
- sex and gender elements of the research to maximise impact and any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

4.3.6.6. Research Integrity Issues

The peer review process can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues with applications or applicants (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information) or the behaviour of other peer reviewers. NHMRC has established specific processes for addressing research integrity concerns that arise in peer review. Peer reviewers must not discuss their concerns with other peer reviewers as this may jeopardise the fair assessment of an application. Instead, these issues should be raised with NHMRC separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed are provided on the [NHMRC website](#).

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 Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy* available on the [NHMRC website](#).

4.3.6.7. Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Peer reviewers must not contact applicants about their application under review. If this occurs, the peer reviewer may be removed from the process, and there is the potential for exclusion from future NHMRC peer review.

Where an applicant contacts a peer reviewer, the relevant application may be excluded from consideration.

¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.3000737>

In either case, contact between applicants and peer reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

4.3.7. Initial assessments

At the initial assessment stage each application is assigned to up to five peer reviewers, including the 1SP, 2SP and three EPRs. Peer reviewers assigned as SPs and EPRs for each application will consider the application in conjunction with any additional assessments e.g. the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria*. They will assess the application against the assessment criteria and score it using the score descriptors. SPs and EPRs enter scores into Sapphire. The 1SP is also required to provide comments in Sapphire, as feedback to applicants. The 2SP is required to comment on the requested budget.

The 1SP comments entered at this stage may be provided to the applicant. Peer reviewers must ensure their comments do not contain inappropriate or defamatory remarks. For further guidance on completing the assessment see section 4.3.12.

4.3.8. Applications requiring further discussion identified

Following initial scoring of applications against the assessment criteria, up to five initial scores will be used to calculate an initial overall rating. Least competitive applications will be deemed not for further consideration (NFFC) and will not proceed to further peer review.

Remaining applications may require further discussion and progress to a panel meeting.

If a panel meeting could not be conducted, 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](#).

1SP comments will be provided to the applicant as outlined at 4.2.4 above. Applications recommended for funding must achieve a minimum mean score of 4.000 in all four assessment criteria.

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 D](#) of the *Partnership Projects 2024 Guidelines*.

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

4.3.9. Panel meetings

It is expected that Partnership Projects panel meetings will occur via videoconference. NHMRC staff will coordinate timing of panel meetings.

4.3.9.1. Panel meeting process

The purpose of the panel meeting is not for individual peer reviewers to regress their scores to the panel mean. It is an opportunity to discuss divergent opinions or aspects of an application that a peer reviewer may have overlooked and adjust their scores as necessary. Peer reviewers should be able to justify how their scores align with the score descriptors.

The process for the panel meeting is as follows:

Declaration of inter-relationships

Suggested time limit: 30 minutes

When panel members (including the Chair and secretariat) meet face-to-face for the first time, each panel member will be invited to briefly describe their expertise and previous peer review experience. During their introductions, members will be asked to declare any relationships with other panel members including:

- current and previous collaborations
- former student/teacher/mentoring relationships
- common employment/institutional relationships
- other relationships that may, or be perceived to, impair fair and impartial assessment.

Chair to announce the application

Suggested time limit: 2 minutes

The Chair will announce the application to be discussed including the title, Administering Institution/s and the CIs.

The Chair will identify any panel members who have a previously identified Col with the application. Those members with a high Col will be temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat (the videoconference connection will remain active).

The Chair will invite panel members to disclose any late interests with the application. If a panel member discloses a new interest, or wishes to discuss any concerns related to an existing Col, the matter will be discussed with the panel. It is up to the remaining panel members to determine if the new interest constitutes a high Col and if the declaring panel member should be temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat. The details of the late interest will be recorded by NHMRC. As this decision making can take extra time, it is important that all interests are disclosed and decided upon well in advance of the meeting, where possible.

If an interest is disclosed at the panel meeting by a SP and it is determined to be a high Col, a new SP will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial SP will be discarded. Discussion of the application will be moved to a later time where possible to give the new SP time to prepare.

Once highly conflicted members (those with a low Col remain in the videoconference) have been temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat, the Chair will then identify the 1SP and 2SP and announce the SP scores for each of the four assessment criteria.

1SP and 2SP to comment on the application

Suggested time limit: 6 minutes (1SP) and 4 minutes (2SP)

The Primary and Secondary SPs will:

- discuss the application's strengths and weaknesses against the assessment criteria, referring to the score descriptors
- 2SP only to add anything not addressed by the 1SP, or explain why they disagree with the 1SP, if applicable, and
- not make reference to the budget at this stage.

Full panel discussion

Suggested time limit: 10 minutes

The Chair will open the full panel discussion with consideration of the *Indigenous Health Research Excellence Criteria* (where relevant). Panel members will have an opportunity to ask questions of SPs and EPRs and the Indigenous health peer reviewer (if present), discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are considered.

The Chair must ensure adequate review of the application occurs, that all members have a fair opportunity to comment and that no member exerts undue influence over others.

Scoring by panel members

Suggested time limit: 3 minutes

Following the panel's discussion, the Chair will ask the 1SP and 2SP to confirm their four criterion scores noting that these may change as a result of the panel discussion.

The Chair will then ask if any member intends to score two or more away from the 1SP criterion scores. If so, the panel member must declare this and provide a brief justification, which will be recorded by the secretariat.

All panel members in the videoconference, excluding the Chair, Indigenous health research peer reviewer and Assistant Chair, must independently score the application in Sapphire. All scoring panel members will provide scores against the four assessment criteria using the seven-point scale outlined in the *Partnership Projects 2024 Score Descriptors (Appendix D)*, as a reference. While the score descriptors provide panel members with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met. Panel members should consider this and ensure the entire seven-point scale is considered when scoring applications.

At the completion of scoring, the panel secretariat will announce the following results:

Overall score - the overall score will be determined by including each panel member's score for each of the assessment criteria. The overall score, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places and will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

Discussion of proposed budget

Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

Applications that score above 4.500 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 score above 3.500 and must also achieve a minimum mean score of 3.000 in all four assessment criteria.

Budget discussions should not commence until the NHMRC secretariat has announced the overall score and advised that the application may progress to budget discussion.

Budget discussions occur only where the 2SP has made a recommendation to discuss the budget. The Assistant Chair will facilitate the budget discussion to ensure applications are considered fairly and equitably. The 2SP will lead the budget discussion assisted by the Assistant Chair and comment on the appropriateness of the outlined costs and provide recommendations. The other SP should be prepared to assist, if required. Other panel members may also provide relevant comments. Where the panel deems the proposed budget exceeds that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended and reasons recorded by the NHMRC secretariat. For further information refer to *Direct Research Costs guidelines* on the [NHMRC website](#).

NHMRC will record budget recommendations as agreed by the panel. NHMRC will check the budget recommendations to ensure the budgets have been recorded correctly and approved by the Chair.

When making budget recommendations, panel 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 D](#) of the *Partnership Projects 2024 Guidelines*.

NHMRC research staff may amend the budget recommended by the panel for any application, if necessary. NHMRC reserves the right to recommend funding levels which are less than those requested in the application and a duration of funding which differs from that requested.

4.3.9.2. Panel Reconciliation

At the end of deliberations, a reconciliation of the review process will take place. This reconciliation gives panel members a final opportunity to raise any concerns regarding the consistency of the review of applications throughout the meeting.

Where a panel member believes an application may have been reviewed in an inconsistent manner, they should raise the matter with the panel Chair. The panel 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.

If the majority of the non-conflicted panel members decide 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.

4.3.10. Quorum

A panel meeting quorum is regarded as 50% plus one of the appointed panel members. If there is an uneven number of panel members, a majority is the next full number after 50% (e.g. 7 in the case of 13 members).

NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to panel meetings, those applications that do not have a scoring quorum and obtain a suitably qualified member (i.e. the Chair) to participate in panel discussion and to score that application. However, in situations where a number of members have a high CoI with an application and a suitably qualified member(s) cannot be sourced, the scoring quorum cannot be less than one-third of the panel members present at the meeting.

4.3.11. 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 ensure conditions are unambiguous and able to be assessed.

CoFs relate to the award 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.

4.3.12. Providing feedback on applications

When conducting assessments, peer reviewers are required to provide constructive qualitative feedback to applicants that focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

Where necessary, changes should be made to ensure the comments reflect the panel discussion.

When providing feedback, you should use neutral language and focus only on what has been provided in the application, avoiding extraneous comments or considerations you might have about the research/er. Feedback should be factual and dispassionate. Avoid reference to your own experience of reviewing the application or overly expressive words that convey emotion. You should be always mindful to frame your feedback against the assessment criteria and score descriptors ([Appendices C and D](#)).

The table below provides guidance to peer reviewers on what NHMRC considers appropriate or inappropriate when providing feedback on grant applications.

Table 2. Guidance on providing feedback on applications

Avoid comments that:	Instead:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make specific comparisons between applications/applicants • Are discourteous, derogatory, unprofessional or use emotive or overly expressive (positive or negative) language • Employ an overly negative or critical tone (i.e. instead of “the applicant failed to”, use “it would improve the application if”) • Use overly expressive language and words that convey emotion (e.g. “disappointingly”, “unfortunately”, “failed to”) • Represent your personal views or attitudes towards a statement written by the applicant/s • Focus on the faults or shortcomings of the application or applicant/s • Refer to your ability/suitability to review the application • Employ a negative or critical tone • Refer to issues that are out of the applicant’s/reviewer’s control (e.g. “This application deserves to be funded”) • Provide broad statements which suggest the application is worthy or not worthy of funding • Minimise accomplishments or claims made by the applicant/s • Use dismissive language or statements that discount or belittle an application or applicant/s • Use stylistic choices that convey the feelings of the reviewer such as rhetorical questions, speculation or punctuation such as exclamation marks. • Use universal language (e.g. “any expert knows”) • Question issues of eligibility or integrity of the application or applicant/s. This should be raised with NHMRC separately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the key elements of the application that influenced your scores • Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the application against each assessment criterion • Use score descriptors associated with the assessment criteria and ensure they are addressed • Focus on the information that is provided in the application • Provide constructive feedback that reflects your scores • Provide neutral statements • Write with an objective tone • Provide specific advice or references to relevant bodies of work you think the applicant/s may have overlooked.

4.3.13. Documentation

Peer reviewers may be required to retain personal notes that they made during the peer review process for a certain period, and if so, these must be held securely and in accordance with reviewers’ obligations of confidentiality. NHMRC will notify peer reviewers of any such requirements prior to the peer review process.

4.3.14. Funding Recommendation

After the panel meetings, application scores from all peer reviewers are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations to NHMRC's Research Committee and Council for advice to the CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

4.3.15. Notification of Outcomes

NHMRC will notify applicants and their Administering Institution's Research Administration Officer of grant application outcomes.

Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary including written feedback reflecting panel discussion. The Application Assessment Summary will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by peer reviewers.

Appendix 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.
- Peer reviewers must only address information provided in the application based on its relevance to the assessment criteria. Any information or issues relating to the applicant(s) outside of the application must not be considered in the peer reviewers assessment. 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 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 and/or via [GrantConnect](#).
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.¹

Independence

- Peer reviewers must provide independent and impartial assessment of applications. Peer reviewer assessments may be informed by input from other experts (e.g. in panel meetings or when considering expert reports) but must not be unduly influenced by the views of other researchers or stakeholders.
- The order of merit determined by peer reviewers is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.
- Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application. 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 scheme's objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that peer reviewers are selected with regard to an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

¹ Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.

Confidentiality

- NHMRC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition NHMRC is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to its collections and use of personal information, and by the commercial confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act.
- Peer reviewers are to treat applications in-confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process.
- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers in the peer review process 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 disclose all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect objectivity in considering particular applications.
- Peer reviewers must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, and interests with applications being reviewed, including:
 - research collaborations
 - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
 - employment arrangements
 - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, undermine fair and impartial judgement.
- Disclosures of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in the assessment of 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.
- 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-scheme 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 peer reviewer or their institution.

Appendix B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Disclosures of Interest

Peer reviewers are required to disclose all interests that are relevant, or could appear to be relevant, to the proposed research.

An interest is a collaboration or relationship which may, or could be perceived to, affect impartial peer review and thus needs to be disclosed and transparently managed (where necessary) to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process. It is essential that peer reviewers not only disclose their own actual interests relating to proposed research (real interest), but also collaborations and relationships that could be perceived by stakeholders to affect impartial peer review (perceived interest). Failure to do so without a reasonable excuse may result in the peer reviewer being removed from the peer review process in accordance with subsection 44B (3) of the NHMRC Act.

A disclosure does not always equate to a conflict of interest (CoI). In determining if an interest is a conflict, peer reviewers should give consideration to the following values that underpin the robust nature of peer review:

- **Impartiality:** The benefits of peer reviewers' expert advice needs to be balanced with the risk of real or perceived interests affecting an impartial review.
- **Significance:** Not all interests are equal. The type of interest needs to be considered in terms of its significance and time when it occurred.
- **Integrity through disclosure:** Peer review rests on the integrity of peer reviewers to disclose any interests and contribute to transparently managing any real or perceived conflicts in a rigorous way. The peer review system cannot be effective without trusting peer reviewers' integrity.

In determining if an interest is a 'High', 'Low', or 'No' conflict, the responsibility is on the peer reviewer to consider the specific circumstances of the situation. This includes:

- the interest's significance
- its impact on the impartiality of the reviewer, and
- maintaining the integrity of the peer review process.

Once a peer reviewer discloses an interest they can provide an explanation of the interest in Sapphire to enable a judgement of its significance. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are required to provide sufficient detail in the explanation, such as date (month and year) and nature of the interest.

The written declaration of interest is retained for auditing purposes by NHMRC. The details below provide general examples and are not to be regarded as a prescriptive checklist.

HIGH Conflict of Interest

Situation

Example

Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)/and or Primary Supervisor

- ✓ Peer reviewer is a CI/PI/or Primary Supervisor on the application under review.
- ✓ Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.

Collaborations

- ✓ Peer reviewer is actively collaborating or has collaborated with the CI or Primary Supervisor in the last three calendar years on publications (co-authorship), pending grant applications and/or existing grants.

Working relationships

- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI/Primary Supervisor currently work or are negotiating future employment in the same:
 - research field at an independent Medical Research Institute.
 - Department or School of a university.
 - Department of a hospital.
- ✓ Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within the same organisation as a CI/Primary Supervisor, or has a pecuniary interest in the organisation (either perceived or real) e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI/Primary Supervisor are on the same committee/board and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would stand to benefit from, or be affected, by the outcome of the application (i.e. vested interested in the proposed research). For example, peer reviewer and CI/Primary Supervisor are both on the same governing board within their organisation.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a Partner Organisation or Partner Investigator listed on the application have:
 - a current working relationship
 - a direct association or collaboration.

Professional relationships and interests

- ✓ Peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's employer is directly affiliated or associated with an organisation(s) that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in the research. For example, a pharmaceutical company, which has provided drugs for testing, has a vested interest in the outcome.

Social relationship and / or interests

- ✓ The peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's immediate family member has a personal or social relationship with a CI/Primary Supervisor on the application.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- ✓ Peer reviewer has taught or supervised a CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies within the last three years.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI/Primary Supervisor co-supervise an undergraduate or postgraduate student and collaborate with each other on the student's research.

Direct financial interest in the application

- ✓ Peer reviewer has the potential for financial gain if the application is successful, such as benefits from: payments from resulting patents, supply of goods and services, access to facilities, and provision of cells/animals as part of the collaboration.
- ✓ Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with that company.
- ✓ Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may affect the company.

Other interests or situations

- ✓ Peer reviewer had or has an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with a CI. This may still be ruled as a high conflict if the events in question occurred beyond the last three years.
- ✓ There are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence the peer review process. In these instances, sufficient details must be provided to allow NHMRC to make a ruling.

LOW Conflict of Interest

Situation

Example

Collaborations

- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than three years ago.
- ✓ Within the last three years, the peer reviewer was part of large collaborations involving the CI, but did not interact or collaborate with the CI directly. Examples include:
 - publication(s) as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors)
 - pending grant applications or existing grants involving more than ten CIs (e.g. large collaborative research centres and network grants)
- ✓ A colleague is planning future collaborations with a CI.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a named AI on the application are actively collaborating or have previously collaborated within the last three years.
- ✓ Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a member of the research team have shared cells/animals/reagents/specialist expertise (biostatistician) etc. but have no other connection to each other.
- ✓ Collaboration between a peer reviewer's colleague/research group and a CI on the application, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest (e.g. direct leadership or responsibility for the researchers involved in the collaboration) in the collaboration, or vice versa.
- ✓ Peer reviewer is considering, planning or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but has no current collaborations, including joint publications/applications under development.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and CI have previously proposed or planned a collaboration that did not progress.

Working relationships

- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI currently work or are negotiating future employment in:
 - the same institution but have no direct association or collaboration.
 - the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments and do not know each other.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI work for two organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same committee/board, but otherwise have no working or social relationships that constitute a high conflict and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would not benefit from, or be affected by, the outcome of the application (i.e. do not have a vested interest in the proposed research). For example, the peer reviewer and CI are both on an external government advisory committee.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a Partner Organisation or Partner Investigator listed on the application:
 - do not associate or collaborate directly
 - have previously held a working relationship but have not associated or collaborated in the past three years.

Professional relationships and interests

- ✓ Peer reviewer and CI's organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a high conflict.

Social relationship and/or interests

- ✓ Peer reviewer's partner or immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work) or perceived relationship with a CI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI that would be perceived or constitute a high conflict.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- ✓ Peer reviewer taught or supervised the CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by a CI, more than three years ago.
- ✓ Peer reviewer and a CI are co-supervisors of an undergraduate or postgraduate student, but they are not collaborating with each other on the student's research (e.g. where one of the supervisors may provide additional expert input or guidance to the student's project or thesis).

Financial interest in the application

- ✓ Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending, supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.
- ✓ Peer reviewer has intellectual property that is being commercialised by an affiliated institution. Peer reviewer has previously provided and/or received cells/animals to/from a CI on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a high conflict.

Other interests or situations

- ✓ Peer reviewer may be, or may be perceived to be, biased in their review of the application. For example, peer reviewer is a lobbyist on an issue related to the application.

Appendix C – Partnership Projects 2024 Assessment Criteria

Applications for the Partnership Projects 2024 grant opportunity are assessed by expert peer reviewers against the assessment criteria listed below and the score descriptors at [Appendix D](#).

Track records are assessed [Relative to Opportunity](#), taking into consideration any career disruptions, where applicable.

It is recognised that Aboriginal and 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.

In addressing the assessment criteria, applicants should consider how the proposal addresses the associated points described below.

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 healthcare 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.

A maximum of 10 Chief Investigators (CIA to CIJ) may be included in the application.

Partner Organisations and Partner Investigators

Partner Organisations and named Partner Investigators will be assessed by the PRP. 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.

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 program or health service
- expectations that align with the goals of the Chief Investigator team.

The inclusion of at least one named Partner Investigator from each of the Partner Organisations is mandatory.

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.

Partner Investigators can also be included as Chief Investigators at the discretion of the CIA. In these situations, the individual will be assessed against both the Chief Investigator and Partner Investigator criteria.

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

Relevance¹ and likelihood to influence health policy and practice (25%)

Assessment will focus on the extent to which the findings from the research are likely to have a significant influence on 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 Partner Organisation(s) 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
- the application addresses issues which are of national or regional significance in improving health or health care.

Criterion Four

Strength of the 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:

¹ Relevance is the extent to which the application addresses the needs of the healthcare system or an affected population.

- 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 Organisation(s) 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 with money in the justification for equipment and facilities and other items of expenditure to sustain the partnership.

Appendix D - Partnership Projects 2024 Score Descriptors

The following descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the four Assessment Criteria. Note that all criteria have equal weighting. Peer Review Panel 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.

Criterion 1. Track records of the Chief investigators, Partner Organisations and Partner Investigators, relative to opportunity (25%)	
Score & Performance indicator	Score descriptors
7 Exceptional	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an exceptional record of achievement in research translation and impact • 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, and other recognition • have strong national and international reputations • hold leadership positions in highly regarded scientific or professional societies <p>have track records that are highly relevant to the proposed research</p> <p>The Partner Organisation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is highly relevant to the proposed research • demonstrates extensive experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • has a very strong national or state/territory-wide reputation • has clear expectations that strongly align with the goals of the CI team • is highly likely to integrate outcomes into a health system or clinical practice, with evidence of becoming self-sustaining • is ideally placed to engage support from stakeholders including end-users and the wider community, and facilitate high uptake at all levels. <p>PI(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates extensive experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • demonstrates previous strong successful relationships with researchers.
6 Outstanding	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an outstanding record of achievement in research translation and impact • 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 • are well recognized for their contribution to their field of research • have established national and some international reputations • have established positions of leadership, or are emerging leaders in their field • hold leadership positions in well regarded scientific or professional societies. <p>The Partner Organisation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 or state/territory-wide 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. <p>PI(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service demonstrates previous successful relationships with researchers.
5 Excellent	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an excellent record of achievement in research, translation and impact

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • have established national reputations and their research appears frequently at national meetings. <p>The Partner Organisation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is relevant to the proposed research • demonstrates experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • has well-established national or state/territory-wide 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. <p>PI(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates experience and some success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • demonstrates previous relationships with researchers.
<p>4 Very Good</p>	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a solid record of achievement in research, translation and impact • show expertise in research translation in policy/practice/implementation, health systems and service delivery • have track records that are relevant to the proposed research • have made contributions to the field of the proposal • have emerging national reputation. <p>The Partner Organisation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is somewhat relevant to the proposed research • demonstrates some experience and success in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • has a very good reputation at least at a state/territory level • has some expectations that align with the goals of the CI team • 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. <p>PI(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates experience in drafting health policy or delivering a health program or health service • demonstrates previous relationships with researchers.
<p>3 Good</p>	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have published a number of good works in a field relevant to this application in the last five years, but is less productive than might reasonably be expected • show good but limited expertise in research translation in policy/practice/implementation, health systems and service delivery • are deficient in some areas of expertise that will be required to successfully complete the proposed research • have limited track records in the field of the proposed research.
<p>2 Satisfactory</p>	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a satisfactory record of achievement • have not published more than a few works in relevant fields of research • are underpowered in terms of relevant expertise required to successfully complete the research program • have track records that do not relate well to the proposed research.
<p>1 Weak or Limited</p>	<p>The CI team members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not productive to any significant extent in relevant fields • do not have the expertise or capacity to successfully complete more than a small fraction of the program of research • do not have relevant track records in the field of the proposed research.

Criterion 2. Scientific quality of the proposal and methodology (25%)	
Score & Performance indicator	Score descriptors
7 Exceptional	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensively and convincingly addresses the objectives of the scheme • has objectives that 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 • consistently 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 • demonstrates broad and meaningful involvement of consumers, community, and/or research end-users throughout the research.
6 Outstanding	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strongly addresses the objectives of the scheme • has objectives that have clear intent and logic • is appropriate for the experience level of the applicant and team • is outstanding in design • is highly feasible • introduces some advances in concept or translational research • includes most aspects of best practice research implementation science methods 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 • demonstrates meaningful involvement of consumers, community, and/or research end-users in all key aspects of the research
5 Excellent	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses all, or almost all, of the objectives of the scheme. • has clear objectives • is excellent in study design • will likely be successfully achieved • includes several but not most aspects of best practice implementation science methods 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 • demonstrates consumer, community, and/or research end-user involvement in a number of key aspects of the research.
4 Very Good	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses a number of the objectives of the scheme • is sound in terms of its objectives • contains several areas of concern in the study design • raises some concerns about successful completion/feasibility • includes some but insufficient aspects of best practice implementation science methods 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 • demonstrates consumer, community, and/or research end-user involvement in a number of aspects of the research.
3 Good	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not convincingly address any of the objectives of the scheme • is satisfactory in terms of its objectives but may not be successful with all of them • contains several areas of significant concern in the study design • raises several concerns about successful completion/feasibility • is not particularly innovative or novel • does not include sufficient implementation science methods • demonstrates limited consumer, community, and/or research end-user involvement in the research.

<p>2 Satisfactory</p>	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not address the objectives of the scheme • 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 sufficient implementation science methods • demonstrates minimal consumer, community, and/or research end-user involvement in limited aspects of the research.
<p>1 Weak or Limited</p>	<p>The Research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not address the objectives of the scheme • shows weak objectives and the methodology is unlikely to achieve them • contains a study design which is inadequate in a number of areas • raises major concerns about the feasibility of the research plan • is not innovative or significant • does not include sufficient implementation science methods • does not demonstrate consumer, community and/or research end-user involvement in any aspect of the research.

Criterion 3. Relevance and likelihood to influence health policy and practice (25%)	
Score & Performance indicator	Score descriptors
7 Exceptional	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will deliver against the intended outcomes of the scheme • address one (or more) highly-prioritised health issue(s) of significance nationally or across one or more state/territory • will translate into health outcomes in the knowledge-base, policy and/or practice of clinical medicine, public health or changes in health policy • will be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national meetings • will almost certainly result in highly influential publications • will most likely become highly integrated into a health system or clinical practice, with evidence of becoming self-sustaining • will have a very high likelihood of becoming a highly effective, generalisable model at a national level or across at least one state /territory that will prove to be beneficial to the health system • will receive high-profile coverage from media and the public in general • will generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development.
6 Outstanding	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will deliver against most of the intended outcomes of the scheme • address a health issue of major importance of national or regional significance • are 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 • are likely to result in highly influential publications • have a likelihood of becoming a highly effective, generalisable model that will prove to be beneficial to the health system • will demonstrate high levels of engagement and support from stakeholders • are likely to 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 accolades and recognition.
5 Excellent	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will deliver outcomes which are relevant to the intended outcomes of the scheme. • address 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 • are likely to result in influential publications • are likely to 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 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.
4 Very Good	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will deliver outcomes which are of relevance to a number of the intended outcomes of the scheme • address a health issue of some importance • may have some novel aspects while others underpin or extend existing knowledge • will likely to result in some strong publications • will most likely form a pilot study for implementation in the future • will require significant support for its implementation • will need regular relationship management of the stakeholders to ensure that the momentum of the project is kept up • will involve end-users and the wider community, although it may not be highly generalisable • will contribute to the knowledge base of the topic area.
3 Good	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not convincingly deliver against the intended outcomes of the scheme. • address an issue of some importance to health • may extend existing knowledge

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 generalisable with other areas of health • have little involvement of end-users and the wider community.
<p>2 Satisfactory</p>	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are unlikely to deliver against the intended outcomes of the scheme • address an issue of only marginal concern to health • provide a program of research which will at best, only incrementally advance current knowledge • may result in published research that is unlikely to be influential • may form a pilot study for a larger study in the future • will require significant work to engage stakeholders and to ensure that the project achieves some of its goals • have virtually no involvement of end-users and the wider community.
<p>1 Weak or Limited</p>	<p>The proposed outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will not deliver against any of the intended outcomes of the scheme • does not address an issue of concern to health • will not advance current knowledge in the field • is unlikely to result in any publications • has no involvement of end-users and the wider community.

Criterion 4. Strength of the partnership (25%)	
Score & Performance Indicator	Score descriptors
7 Exceptional	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 of exceptional collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and Australia • 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 intimately involved at all stages of the proposed research • is shown by shared policy/practice goals and significant cash and in-kind resource contributions • illustrates capacity building, networking and infrastructure building activities that will extend beyond the life of the project.
6 Outstanding	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates that a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) already exists or will be developed • demonstrates existing or highly plausible 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 integrated into the proposal. This proposal is therefore co-developed • shows that the project plan was developed by a collaborative process between the researchers and their decision making partners • 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 of outstanding collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and Australia.
5 Excellent	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 excellent 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 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 of excellent collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and major centres in Australia.
4 Very Good	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates the potential of a relationship between the researchers and Partner Organisation(s) will exist • demonstrates some shared governance and decision making capability • shows very good team integration and cohesiveness in terms of skills and experiences • would be reasonably effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges • is reflected in the likelihood that the project will build skills and capacity within the partner or the target organisations • shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support • likely to 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 probability of collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health in localised areas and some major centres in Australia.

<p>3 Good</p>	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows good team integration and cohesiveness in terms of skills and experiences • shows some prospects for promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges • will provide good capacity building/career development opportunities • shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support • may be unsuitable to achieve the goals of this project • shows probability of some collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health.
<p>2 Satisfactory</p>	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is satisfactory in terms of complementary skills and experiences, and how it would contribute to the success of the project • shows limited prospects for promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges • will provide some building/career development opportunities • shows minimal 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.
<p>1 Weak or Limited</p>	<p>The proposed partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not show complementary skills and experience, and how it would contribute to the success of the project • does not show prospects for promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchanges • will not provide capacity building/career development opportunities • shows limited contributions in terms of cash/in-kind support • will not achieve the goals of this project • shows no collaborative gains in terms of skills and benefits to health.

Appendix E - 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.

Peer reviewers will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, when scoring the *Assessment Criteria* set out in [Appendix C](#).

Appendix F – Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

Peer reviewers should consider the following when assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians. The points below should be explicit throughout the application and not just addressed separately within the Indigenous criteria section.

Community Engagement

- Does the proposal clearly demonstrate a thorough and culturally appropriate level of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or health services prior to submission of the application?
- Is there clear evidence that the level of engagement throughout the project will ensure the feasibility of the proposed study?
- Has the application demonstrated evidence that any of the methods, objectives or key elements of the proposed work have been formed, influenced or defined by the community?
- Were the Indigenous community instrumental in identifying and inviting further research into the health issue and will the research outcomes directly benefit the 'named' communities?
- Is there a history of working together with the 'named' communities e.g. co-development of the grant, involvement in pilot studies or how the 'named' communities will have input/control over the research process and outcomes across the life of the project?

Benefit

- Does the proposal clearly outline the potential health benefits (both intermediate and long term, direct and indirect) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the benefit(s) of the project have been determined or guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities or organisations themselves?

Sustainability and Transferability

- Does the proposal:
 - Provide a convincing argument that the outcomes will have a positive impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which can be maintained after the study has been completed?
 - Have relevance to other Indigenous communities?
 - Clearly plan for and articulate a clear approach to knowledge translation and exchange?
 - Demonstrate that the findings are likely to be taken up in health services and/or policy?
- Will the outcomes from the study make a lasting contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their wellbeing?

Building Capability

- Does the proposal outline how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or communities will benefit from capability development?
- Does the proposal outline how researchers and individuals/groups associated with the research project will develop capabilities that allow them to have a greater understanding/engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Appendix G – Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience

Principles

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that knowledge from health and medical research is translated through commercialisation (e.g. by pharmaceutical or medical devices companies), improvements to policy, health service delivery and clinical practice.

Therefore, as a complement to other measures of research excellence (e.g. publication and citation rates), NHMRC considers industry-relevant skills, experience and achievements in its assessment of applicants' track records.

These measures recognise that applicants who have invested their research time on technology transfer, commercialisation or collaborating with industry, may have gained highly valuable expertise or outputs relevant to research translation. However, NHMRC acknowledges that these researchers will necessarily have had fewer opportunities to produce traditional academic research outputs (e.g. peer reviewed publications).

Therefore, peer reviewers should:

- appropriately recognise applicants' industry-relevant experiences and results
- allow for the time applicants have spent in commercialisation/industry for 'relative to opportunity' considerations.

Who might have industry experience or be preparing for industry experience?

Many applicants to NHMRC may have had industry experiences of various kinds. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Researchers who have left academia to pursue a full time career in industry (e.g. in pharmaceutical, biotechnology or start-up companies). In such instances, outputs must be assessed 'relative to opportunity', as there may have been restrictions in producing traditional research outputs (such as peer reviewed publications), but highly valuable expertise gained or outputs produced relevant to research translation (such as patents or new clinical guidelines).
2. Academic researchers whose work has a possible commercial focus. These researchers might not have yet entered into commercial agreements with industry and have chosen to forego or delay publication in order to protect or extend their intellectual property (IP).
3. Academic researchers who have translated their discovery into a collaborative agreement with industry. The researcher may be collaborating with the company in further research and development; may have a licensing agreement; or may have licensed or assigned their IP to the company. A researcher may ultimately leave the academic institution and become Chief Executive Officer, Chief Scientific Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Scientific Advisory Board Member or consultant for a start-up or other company, based on their experience.
4. Academic researchers who are actively collaborating with companies, for example by providing expert research services for fees. Publications of such work might be precluded or delayed according to contract arrangements. The specialised nature of this research might also restrict publication to specialised journals only, as opposed to generalist journals.

Relevant industry outputs

Level of experience/output	IP	Collaboration with an industry partner	Established a start-up company	Product to market	Clinical trials or regulatory activities	Industry participation
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patent granted: consider the type of patent and where it is granted. It can be more difficult to be granted a patent in, for example, the US or Europe than in Australia, depending on the patent prosecution and regulatory regime of the intended market National phase entry and prosecution or specified country application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executed a licensing agreement with an established company Significant research contract with an industry partner Long term consultancy with an industry partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieved successful exit (public market flotation, merger or acquisition) Raised significant (>\$10m) funding from venture capital or other commercial sources (not grant funding bodies) Chief Scientific Officer, Executive or non-executive role on company boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce sales Successful regulator submission to US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Medicines Agency, TGA etc. Medical device premarket submission e.g. FDA 510(k) approved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase II or Phase III underway or completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major advisory or consultancy roles with international companies
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) or 'international application' Provisional patent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a formal arrangement such as a consultancy or research contract and actively collaborating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporated an entity and established a board Has raised moderate (>\$1m) funding from commercial sources or government schemes that required industry co-participation (e.g. ARC Linkage, NHMRC Development Grant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generated regulatory standard data set Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or European Conformity (CE) marking Medical device: applications for pre-market approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase I underway or completed Protocol development Patient recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory or consultancy role with a national company
Preliminary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IP generated Patent application lodged Invention lodged with Disclosure/s with Technology Transfer/Commercialisation Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approached and in discussion with an industry partner under a non-disclosure agreement. No other formal contractual arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiated licence to IP from the academic institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed pre-good manufacturing practice (GMP) prototype and strong supporting data Established quality systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug candidate selected or Investigative New Drug application filed Preclinical testing 	