



## **Additional resource for applicants Synergy Grants 2024**

# **Characteristics of high scoring Synergy grant applications**

### **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Common characteristics of high scoring applications
3. Key recommendations when addressing the Knowledge Gain criterion
4. Key recommendations when addressing the Synergy criteria
5. Characteristics of high-scoring Chief Investigator track records



## 1. Introduction

NHMRC's peer review system seeks to ensure transparency, probity and fairness in determining the highest quality research and researchers. For effective peer review, NHMRC relies on the participation of dedicated reviewers to assess applications carefully and fairly. To capture valuable feedback and thoughts from peer reviewers on their experience, Synergy Grant reviewers from previous rounds were asked to provide NHMRC with advice on common characteristics of high scoring applications and key recommendations when addressing the scheme criteria.

Below is a summary of this information. The advice is based on feedback from reviewers only, and not informed by overall scores.

## 2. Common characteristics of high scoring applications

### Clarity of responses to the criteria

- Well written (no errors), well justified, with clear and concise statements
- Addressed criteria questions clearly, followed applicant guidance correctly

Peer reviewer comments
<i>Multi-disciplinary teams covering skills and methods beyond what you would expect to see within a regular research team; well-articulated problems/issues; good attention to translation of outcomes; uniform formatting and interpretation of criteria being addressed in the track record sections; diverse inputs from team members.</i>
<i>Diverse team with well integrated and complementary expertise in different fields. Really well set out research plan. Clear explanation of the problem.</i>
<i>Quality papers that have significantly impacted the field, NOT quantity of papers. Translating knowledge gain (from this publication) into clinical practice, policy and practice, or commercial outcomes. Substantial contributions to their fields beyond their research. e.g. Institutional leadership or executive positions within scientific societies.</i>
<i>Clear, appropriate scope, achievable project, important, clearly articulated methodology with good rationale. Clear, diverse team and appropriate plans including mentoring. Clearly articulated impact/research contribution to impact/applicant contribution to impactful research; leadership across multiple dimensions appropriate to career stage.</i>
<i>Applications that were well organised and formatted. Less use of jargon and acronyms. The diverse and inter-related disciplines were clearly demonstrated. Good applications do not require the reviewer to join the dots – the applicant does it for you. The specific projects were described in enough detail to understand what the group wanted to do including feasibility and quality but not so much that you got lost.</i>
<i>Care and attention to detail in writing each section i.e. answering the question. Writing clearly with statements followed by clear evidence to corroborate every statement. No assumed knowledge, but clear explanations of different aspects of the work. Having all CIs for one application format their answers in the same way also helped when done well. Conveying enthusiasm in their responses.</i>
<i>Big problems, capable teams, detailed explanations of how they intended to conduct the research.</i>

### 3. Key recommendations when addressing the Knowledge Gain criterion

Peer reviewer comments
<i>Choose the scope wisely. It needs to be meaningful enough to require this grant, but realistically achievable. Clearly articulated methodology with well-specified rationale for the methodology and demonstrated expertise in relevant methods. Clarity of the proposal is especially important for this grant type since reviewers necessarily are unlikely to have discipline expertise in all components of the proposal.</i>
<i>Although the Synergy applications are large scale, you still need to include enough information about what you will do to allow the reviewers to assess your proposed research. Clearly indicate which aspects of programs the Synergy grant will support. Clearly indicate how the outputs of the proposal address the unmet need you identify.</i>
<i>Emphasise the impact versus the concrete outcomes/deliverables of your project- don't lump these different concepts together and try to avoid over-generalising. Use images to highlight and summarise aspects of the proposal that you want to stand out. Present why this is a major challenge in the field and why now is the right time and why you are the right team to tackle it.</i>
<i>Clarity around aims, objectives and significance. Use diagrams, images where possible. Ensure the question you are addressing is as simple and as clear as possible.</i>
<i>To ensure the problem and the reason why it hasn't been able to be solved with skills from a single field or discipline has not been able to be solved previously is really well articulated, and in doing so provide clear well-argued rationale how solving this problem is critical for the field, disease, health etc. Clear articulation of the likely knowledge or impact translation pathways to address that critical issue.</i>

### 4. Key recommendations when addressing the Synergy criteria

Peer reviewer comments
<i>Remember that multidisciplinary, diversity, and collaborative gain amongst the team are assessed for chief investigators (CIs) only. Whilst it can be helpful to provide information about associate investigators (AIs) also, there needs to be clear articulation and differentiation of whether CIs or AIs are being discussed. Consider whether your team might be missing a discipline that should be represented in the CI team. Clear team roles and demonstrations of relevant previous collaborations (amongst team members or with others not on the present team) are helpful.</i>
<i>To carefully consider the need for multi-disciplinary approach to solve the problem beyond the normal mix of disciplines common to different field. To ensure that how the different skills of each of the individual team members will provide the ability to address the critical issue is well articulated. Be careful that the team does not simply look like the type of mix of skills that would be grouped in existing research teams in the field.</i>
<i>Ensure roles/contributions of each CI and AI are clear, for example who leads/contributes to each component of the research plan. Demonstrate diversity/inclusiveness clearly including leadership of sub-programs by diverse team members, clear integration of community representation. Describe clear governance and career development/mentoring/capacity development strategies.</i>
<i>Clearly demonstrate how the different types of expertise combine AND will be utilised to achieve outcomes; have a team comprising of different types of expertise; spell out clearly how this unique combination actually provides new insights that any one discipline alone cannot provide.</i>
<i>Clearly show how the outcomes will be taken up and achieved beyond the research. Describe how the multidisciplinary teams will work together in practical ways. Explain fully when speaking to mentoring and development opportunities and strategies.</i>

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## 5. Characteristics of a high-scoring Chief Investigator track record<sup>1</sup>

- A strong top 10 publications track record, relative to opportunity, including publications with first/last authorship and effectively describing and substantiating the applicant's role in multi-author work
- Clear and specific explanation of the applicant's contribution to the selected publications and justification of the publication's importance to the field
- Consistent high-quality research outcomes/outputs, relative to opportunity
- Clear evidence of upward career trajectory
- Research impact was clearly described and evidenced/corroborated
  - Used tangible examples to illustrate the change (impact) that occurred as a direct result of the research
  - Clearly identified an impact beyond the initial research finding
  - Included evidence that the impact had significant and far-reaching benefits
  - Clearly described and evidenced how the applicant's research program contributed to the reach and significance of the impact
  - Clearly described and evidenced how the applicant contributed to the research program that led to the research impact
- Evidence of a leadership role in their field of research or institution.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes feedback from Investigator Grant peer reviewers