Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

Ideas Grants 2025 Peer Review Guidelines

Opening date:	12 March 2025
Closing date and time:	13:00 ACT local time on 7 May 2025
Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Sapphire assistance and enquiries:	NHMRC Research Help Centre Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au Note: NHMRC's Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within 2 working days. This timeframe may be longer during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.
Ideas Grants enquiries	Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au

Contents

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 Ideas Grants 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:

- Ideas Grant 2025 grant opportunity 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

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the Ideas Grants 2025 grant opportunity:

- The Ideas Grants 2025 assessment criteria has been amended to provide further clarification on assessing applications submitted to the Ideas Grants scheme that contain a clinical trial and cohort study component.
- The score descriptor for the Research Quality assessment criterion includes an additional component. Peer reviewers will be asked to take into consideration the extent of alignment of the grant proposal to scheme objectives and expected outcomes (see Appendix D).

  In response to feedback from the sector to increase transparency and accountability of the peer review process, assessors will be asked to confirm whether they have identified any comments of concern with the Secretariat, as part of the comment sharing process outlined at section 4.3.6.

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). This includes adhering to the key principles and applicable requirements of the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024* (CGRPs) and the published grant opportunity guidelines.

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 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

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, as per NHMRC's *Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Grant Applications and Peer Review*.

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 (CoI)?

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

An outline of potential CoI 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' CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of 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 (FoI)

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 FoI 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 involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the NHMRC website.

4. Ideas Grant peer review process

4.1. Overview of the Ideas Grant peer review process

7 May 2025	Deadline for Ideas Grant application submission
May 2025	Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications (2 week period)
June 2025	Assessments against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (2 week period)
July - August 2025	Peer Reviewers will be given 4 weeks to assess applications during this time. Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against Ideas Grants assessment criteria for each allocated application
September 2025	Peer reviewers will be given 1 week to review other assessor comments for each application assigned to them
November 2025 (date is indicative and subject to change)	Outcomes announced

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 Ideas Grants peer review process are identified below.

4.2.1. Peer Review Mentors

Peer Review Mentors need to:

- familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them
- mentor peer reviewers through the assessment stage of peer review, as required or requested
- respond to peer reviewer enquiries on NHMRC peer review process and policy.

Peer Review Mentors may need to:

- review peer reviewer written summaries for inappropriate comments
- 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

- review any changes to the proposed budget recommended by peer reviewers and provide advice to NHMRC on whether the recommendations are appropriate for the project, fully justified and consistent with the Peer Review Guidelines.

4.2.2. Peer reviewers

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 them
- provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Ideas Grants assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendix C and Appendix D) in a timely manner, for each non-conflicted application assigned
- 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
- review comments from all peer reviewers for all applications assigned to them

4.2.3. 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.

NHMRC staff will:

- invite individuals to participate in the Ideas Grant 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
- review peer reviewer written summaries for inappropriate comments.
- 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
- conduct an outlier screening process to identify applications with outlier scores. NHMRC will review those applications where there is a clear discrepancy between the scores and comments provided and will seek clarification from the relevant peer reviewer(s)
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers
- seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.

4.2.4. 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 external peer reviewers will not participate in scoring. They will act as external experts and provide guiding comments to the peer reviewers relating to the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria.

4.2.5. Community Observers

NHMRC invites respected members of the general community to observe whether NHMRC policy and procedures are being adhered to during the peer review process. Observers assist NHMRC in ensuring that the assessment of all applications is fair, equitable and impartial.

Observers will be briefed on the processes and procedures of the peer review of Ideas Grant applications. They will not participate in the review of any application.

Observers will:

- identify and advise NHMRC of all conflict of interests and monitor the procedural aspects of peer review.
- provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of peer review processes and policies.

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

4.3. Reviewing Ideas Grant applications

All Ideas Grant applications are assessed against the Ideas Grant assessment criteria and the associated score descriptors at Appendix C and Appendix 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 Ideas Grant 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 CoI.

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. Instructions and tutorials for selecting this in Sapphire are provided in the *Sapphire Learning and Training Resources.*

4.3.4. Assignment of applications to peer reviewers

Considering CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications to peer reviewers. Each application will be assigned up to 5 reviews.

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 Ideas Grant 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

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high CoI 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.

NHMRC will aim to obtain 5 independent assessments for each application.

Peer reviewers will be able to seek clarification from independent Peer Review Mentors on peer review policies and processes during the assessment phase.

Peer reviewers summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the application against each assessment criteria. This feedback will be provided to the applicant. Peer reviewers must remember their obligation to remain fair and impartial when providing their feedback to applicants.

To ensure that independent scores are provided, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers.

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 from which funding recommendations will be based. 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 3 decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

Based on the calculated ratings, applications will be deemed a category level as follows:

Overall score	Deemed category
1.001 - 1.500	1
1.501 - 2.500	2
2.501 - 3.500	3
3.501 - 4.500	4
4.501 - 5.500	5
5.501 - 6.500	6
6.501 - 7.000	7

Assessor comment sharing and review

As introduced during the 2022 round, at the conclusion of the assessment period, peer review comments against the assessment criteria will be shared (anonymously) with other assessors on the same applications. Assessors have an additional step to review how their own assessment comments aligned with those provided by other (de-identified) reviewers on the same application, and alert NHMRC if they identify any comments of concern. Assessors will be asked to confirm whether they have identified any comments of concern with the Secretariat.

Outlier screening check

Following the completion of peer review, NHMRC will conduct an outlier screening check to identify any outlier scores. Assessor comments for applications with outlier scores will be reviewed by NHMRC staff to assess whether the comments provided by the assessor align with

the score provided. Where the comments provided do not align with the scores, NHMRC staff will follow up with the relevant peer reviewer to ensure the assessment provided is correct.

4.3.6.1. 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*.

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

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*.

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.

4.3.6.2. 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
- 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.

4.3.6.3. 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. NHMRC provides advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed.

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*.

4.3.6.4. 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.

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. Minimum number of assessments

The minimum number of assessments for an application is regarded as 50% plus one of the peer reviewers assigned to score an application. If there is an uneven number of peer reviewers assigned to an application, the minimum number of assessments is the next full number after 50% (e.g. 3 assessments in the case of 5 peer reviewers).

4.3.8. 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, peer reviewers or NHMRC 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.

4.3.9. 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.

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 (Appendix C and Appendix D).**

The NHMRC Peer Review disclaimer provides information to applicants who receive qualitative feedback.

4.3.10. 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.

4.3.11. Funding recommendation

Final 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 the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

4.3.12. 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 and written comments from each assigned peer reviewer. 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.

Appendices

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 in the NHMRC *Complaints Policy*. 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.
- Peer Review Mentors (PRMs) are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application. PRMs act to ensure that NHMRC's processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

Appropriateness and balance

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

- 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.

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 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[2] 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.

[2] For the purposes of disclosing interests, in Appendix B the term peer reviewers also includes observers and NHMRC staff.

HIGH Conflict of Interest – situations and examples

Associated with Application or Chief Investigator (CI)

- Peer reviewer is a CI or Associate Investigator (AI) 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 in the last 3 calendar years on publications (co-authorship), pending grant applications and/or existing grants.

Working relationships

- Peer reviewer and a CI 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, 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 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.

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 on the application.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- Peer reviewer has taught or supervised a CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies within the last 3 years.
- Peer reviewer and a CI 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 3 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 – situations and examples

Collaborations

- Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than 3 years ago.
- Within the last 3 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 3 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 or AI 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
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI work for 2 organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI 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.

Professional relationships and interests

- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI's organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI or AI 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 or AI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI or AI 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 3 years ago.
- Peer reviewer taught or supervised the AI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised an AI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by an AI.
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI 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 or AI 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 or AI 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 Ideas Grants 2025 Assessment criteria

The objective of the Ideas Grant scheme is to support innovative research projects addressing a specific question(s). The expected outcomes are:

- innovative and creative research
- funding of researchers at all career stages, and
- funding any area of health and medical research from discovery to implementation.

The scheme will provide particular opportunities for early and mid-career researchers. It is expected that the CIA will have the leadership and skills to achieve the proposed project aims.

The Ideas Grant scheme is not intended to support research where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective.

Only applications that address the intended objective and outcomes will be competitive for funding. The Ideas Grant scheme is not intended to support research where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective, and applications meeting that description should be submitted to the Clinical Trial and Cohort Studies scheme. Where applications have elements consistent with both the Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies Grant scheme and the Ideas Grant scheme, applicants should decide where the project is predominantly suited, based on the objectives and intended outcomes of the respective schemes and where the application would receive the most appropriate peer review.

The following category descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the four assessment criteria:

1) **Research Quality** - NHMRC defines 'Research Quality' for the Ideas Grant scheme as the quality of the project aims and the proposed research plan. Given the focus on innovation, it is expected that the research proposals for Ideas Grant applications will include some element of risk; applicants should demonstrate an appreciation of those risks and incorporate strategies to address any uncertainties as part of their proposed research plan. With the focus on innovation and creativity as a scheme objective, preliminary results and pilot studies are not expected for Ideas Grant applications.

2) **Innovation & Creativity** - NHMRC defines 'Innovation & Creativity' for the Ideas Grant scheme as health and medical research that seeks to challenge and shift current paradigms and/or have a major impact on a health research area through one or more studies that creatively:

- develop or use novel research concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions
- propose a reinterpretation, refinement, improvement or new application of existing theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions, or
- integrate and adapt concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions from other research fields or disciplines for a new purpose or in a new way.

Applicants should clearly explain their point of difference from current concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions in order to sufficiently demonstrate innovation and

creativity in their proposed research.

(Refer to Appendix C of the Ideas Grants 2023 Guidelines for more information on the concept of Innovation and Creativity.)

3) **Significance** - NHMRC defines 'Significance' for the Ideas Grant scheme as the extent to which the outcomes and outputs will result in advancements to and/or impact on the research or health area.

4) **Capability** - NHMRC defines 'Capability' for the Ideas Grant scheme as the appropriateness of the applicant team and their expertise, the resources and access to additional personnel necessary to achieve the project aims. The CIA must demonstrate their ability to lead the project, including managing the project's resources, personnel, budget and administrative requirements, in order to execute the project. Associate Investigators (AIs) can be included to strengthen the overall technical capability of the team (e.g. specialists such as statisticians), but they must not be essential for the leadership of the project. Capability is not an assessment of traditional track record elements. Consideration should also be given to the gender balance and development of new researchers within the applicant team, if relevant.

Appendix D Ideas Grants 2025 Score descriptors

While the category descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, **it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.**

The descriptors are a guide to a "best fit" outcome. The process of consistently referring panel members to these descriptors is vital to ensuring equity, thoroughness, and process consistency both within and across all grant reviews.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
7 Exceptional	The project aims and proposed research plan: are extremely well aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by an extremely well justified hypothesis/rationale are focused, well-defined, extremely coherent and have a flawless study design and approach would be extremely competitive with the best, similar research proposals internationally have extremely well identified and managed scientific and technical risks.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates extremely innovative project aims, which will result in an extremely substantial shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to an extremely substantial breakthrough or impact in the research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue of critical importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) will result in extremely significant outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues will lead to extremely significant research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates a very strong capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has exceptional capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes. has access to exceptional technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) necessary for the project. has an extremely appropriate balance of integrated expertise, experience and training that specifically targets all aspects of the proposed research, in both depth and breadth.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
6 Outstanding	The project aims and proposed research plan: are very well aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by a very well justified hypothesis/rationale are focused, well-defined, very highly coherent and have an outstanding study design and approach with a minor weakness would be very highly competitive with the best, similar research proposals internationally have very well identified and managed scientific and technical risks with only a few minor weaknesses.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates very highly innovative project aims, which will result in a very substantial shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to a very substantial breakthrough or impact in the research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue that is of very high importance to advance the research or health area (not the prevalence or magnitude of the issue) will result in very highly significant outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues will lead to very highly significant research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates a strong capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has outstanding capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes has access to outstanding technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) necessary for the project has a very highly appropriate balance of integrated expertise, experience and training that is targeted towards all aspects of the proposed research, in both depth and breadth.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
5 Excellent	The project aims and proposed research plan: are well aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by a well justified hypothesis/rationale are focused, well-defined, highly coherent and have an excellent study design and approach with a few minor weaknesses would be competitive with the best, similar research proposals internationally have well identified and managed scientific and technical risks with a few minor concerns.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates highly innovative project aims, which will result in a substantial shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to a substantial breakthrough or impact in the research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue of considerable importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) will result in highly significant outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues will lead to highly significant research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates good capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has excellent capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes has access to excellent technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) necessary for the project has a highly appropriate balance of integrated expertise, experience and training necessary for all aspects of the proposed research, in both depth and breadth.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
4 Very good	The project aims and proposed research plan: are aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by a well justified hypothesis/rationale are focused, well-developed, coherent and have a very good study design and approach with several minor concerns would be likely to be competitive with high quality, similar research proposals internationally have identified and managed scientific and technical risks, with several minor concerns.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates innovative project aims, which will result in a moderate shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to a moderate breakthrough or impact in the research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue of importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) will result in significant outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues will lead to significant research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has very good capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes has access to very good technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) necessary for the project has an appropriate balance of integrated expertise, experience and training necessary for all aspects of the proposed research, in both depth and breadth.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
3 Good	The project aims and proposed research plan: are somewhat aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by a sound hypothesis/rationale are logical, generally clear in the study design and approach with more than a few minor concerns would be somewhat competitive with high quality, similar research proposals internationally have identified and managed scientific and technical risks, with some major concerns.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates some innovative project aims, which will likely result in some shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to some breakthrough or impact in the health research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue of some importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) will result in moderately significant outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues will lead to moderately significant research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates some capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has good capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes has access to good technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) necessary for the project has expertise, experience and training that is essential, integrated and balanced for most aspects of the proposed research, in both depth and breadth, with some major concerns.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
2 Satisfactory	The project aims and proposed research plan: are marginally aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are supported by a satisfactory hypothesis/rationale are satisfactory in the study design and approach, but may lack clarity in some aspects and may contain some major weaknesses would be marginally competitive with high quality, similar research proposals internationally have identified and managed scientific and technical risks, but there are several major concerns.	Relative to the research field, the planned research demonstrates somewhat innovative project aims, which will result in a minor shift in the current paradigm, and/or lead to a minor breakthrough or impact in the health research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field: will address an issue of marginal importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) may result in outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues may lead to research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA demonstrates some capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: has some capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes has access to some of the necessary technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities and, if required, may have access to additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) relevant to the project, with some notable concerns has some but not all of the expertise, experience and training essential to the proposed research in depth and breadth, with several major concerns.

CATEGORY	Research Quality (35%)	Innovation & Creativity (25%)	Significance (20%)	Capability (20%)
1 Marginal to Poor	The project aims and proposed research plan: are not aligned to scheme objectives and expected outcomes are underpinned by a weak hypothesis/rationale have significant flaws in the study design and approach and may contain several major weaknesses are unlikely to be competitive with similar research proposals internationally have not satisfactorily identified and managed scientific and technical risks.	Relative to the research field, the planned research does not demonstrate innovative project aims, and is unlikely to cause a shift in the current paradigm, or lead to a breakthrough or impact in the health research area.	The planned research, relative to the research field will address an issue of some concern to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of the issue) unlikely to result in outcomes in the science, knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues unlikely to lead to research outputs (intellectual property, publications, products, services, conferences, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.).	The CIA does not demonstrate capability to lead the team in achieving the project aims. The CI applicant team overall: does not demonstrate capability to execute the project and deliver outcomes does not have access to the necessary technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities or, if required, additional support personnel (Associate Investigators) relevant to the project, with several major concerns does not have access to expertise, experience and training essential to the proposed research in depth and breadth.

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.

Table 1. Relevant industry outputs

	Advanced	Intermediate	Preliminary
IP	• 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	• Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) or 'international application' • Provisional patent	• IP generated • Patent application lodged • Invention lodged with Disclosure/s with Technology Transfer/Commercialisation Office

	Advanced	Intermediate	Preliminary
Collaboration with an industry partner	• Executed a licensing agreement with an established company • Significant research contract with an industry partner • Long term consultancy with an industry partner	• Established a formal arrangement such as a consultancy or research contract and actively collaborating	• Approached and in discussion with an industry partner under a non-disclosure agreement. No other formal contractual arrangements.
Established a start-up company	• 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	• 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	• Negotiated licence to IP from the academic institution

	Advanced	Intermediate	Preliminary
Product to market	• 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	• Generated regulatory standard data set • Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or European Conformity (CE) marking • Medical device: applications for pre-market approval	• Developed pre-good manufacturing practice (GMP) prototype and strong supporting data • Established quality systems
Clinical trials or regulatory activities	• Phase II or Phase III underway or completed	• Phase I underway or completed • Protocol development • Patient recruitment	• Drug candidate selected or Investigative New Drug application filed • Preclinical testing
Industry participation	• Major advisory or consultancy roles with international companies	• Advisory or consultancy role with a national company	