



Feedback from Investigator Grant reviewers on key characteristics of Investigator Grant applications

Feedback from Investigator Grant reviewers from the 2019–2023 rounds has been analysed by NHMRC to provide advice on common characteristics of high-scoring and low-scoring applications. Below is a summary of key themes against the criteria. The advice is based on feedback from reviewers only, and not informed by overall scores or separated by Leadership Level.

Characteristics of high-scoring Investigator Grant applications

Clarity of responses to the criteria

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

Track record, relative to opportunity

- 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

Knowledge gain

- A clear research proposal with well-justified rationale/methods/hypothesis with a strong vision for the future outlining a program of research that is achievable/feasible within the 5-year timeframe, and not just a set of disparate projects
- Clear statements on:
 - What the research might achieve
 - How the proposed research is a significant progression on current activities, with a clear trajectory
- No assumed knowledge, proposed research described in a way that is understandable to someone not directly in the field (avoided jargon and obscure acronyms)



Characteristics of low-scoring Investigator Grant applications

Clarity of responses to the criteria

- The application was poorly constructed or poorly written/lacking in coherence
- Did not follow the instructions provided in applicant guidance
- Incorrect use of sections
 - using sections to provide additional personal track record, instead of providing what was asked
- The application appeared 'rushed' or less prepared

Track record, relative to opportunity

- Did not effectively convey quality, significance and impact of their nominated publications
- Few publications where the candidate was a lead author, relative to opportunity
- Minimal output with minimal impact
- Did not correctly address the impact criteria
 - Failed to adequately corroborate impact claims with evidence
 - Nominating initial research findings or publications as the research impact, without describing the change that resulted from the use, adaption or adoption of that knowledge
 - Excessive repetition across the sub-criteria
 - Poorly articulated claims of significance, reach or contribution
 - Little/no evidence of the applicant's role in the impact
- Little attention to leadership section
- Limited/no evidence of leadership

Knowledge gain

- There was a lack of detail, focus or cohesion in the research proposal
- Poor justification for the research hypothesis
- Research outcomes lacked vision, direction, impact or significance
- Research outcomes lacked clarity due to an overly technical research plan
- There was not enough detail to justify how the research could be undertaken within the available resources and 5-year timeframe
- No cohesive outline of a five-year research program. Focussed on prior work, with no clear demonstration of the new knowledge to be gained
- Proposed research did not demonstrate progression on current activities
- Research outcomes poorly defined
- Applications were too technical, assumed knowledge, and included heavy use of jargon
- Poor methodology or insufficient methodological detail
- Research proposals did not provide clear details as per assessment criteria (i.e. access to additional expertise required, resources etc.)