RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS
PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES

for funding commencing in 2015
# OVERVIEW OF PEER REVIEW PROCESS 2014

1. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT
2. CHANGES TO THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS
3. CONDUCT DURING PEER REVIEW
4. PEER REVIEW PARTICIPANTS
5. PEER REVIEW PROCESS

## PEER REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Peer Review Participants Table

4.1.1 Research Committee Portfolio Representative
4.1.2 Community Observer
4.1.3 Peer Review Panel Chair
4.1.4 Peer Review Panel Member
4.1.5 Primary Spokesperson (ISP)
4.1.6 Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)
4.1.7 Additional Experts
4.1.8 Senior NHMRC Staff
4.1.9 NHMRC Staff
4.2 Peer Review Panels

## PEER REVIEW PROCESS

5.1 Receipt and Initial Processing of Applications
5.2 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Research Assessment
5.3 Assignment of Applications to PRPs
5.4 Identification of Conflict of Interests
5.5 Allocation of Spokespersons
5.6 PRP Members Access to Applications
5.7 Review of Retiring Fellows
5.8 Part One – Initial Review of Applications
5.8.1 General Guidelines for Shortlisting
5.8.2 Preliminary Scoring of Applications
5.8.3 Confirmation of Applications Not For Further Consideration
5.8.4 Process for the Shortlisting Teleconference
5.9 Part Two – Applications proceeding to further Peer Review
5.9.1 Interviews
5.9.2 Conduct during Interviews
5.9.3 Procedure for Ranking Applicants
5.9.4 Daily Panel Review
5.9.5 Final Ranking
5.10 Notification of Outcomes
5.10.1 Outcome Letters
5.10.2 Feedback Reports

Attachment A - Criteria for Health and Medical Research of Indigenous Australians
Attachment B - Statement of Expectations
Attachment C - Research Fellowships Assessment Criteria
Attachment D - Research Fellowships Scoring Descriptors
Attachment E - What to expect at a Research Fellowships interview
Attachment F - NHMRC Research Fellowships Interview Run Sheet
Overview of Peer Review Process 2014

Research Fellowships applications close: 29 January 2014

Assessment of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Health applications: February – March 2014

Allocation of applications to panels: 12 February 2014

Briefing teleconference for panels: 21 February 2014

Conflicts of Interest identified: 28 February 2014

Allocation of Spokespersons: 7 March 2014

Initial Scoring: 21 March 2014

Shortlisting (NFFC) teleconferences: 1 April 2014

Notification of shortlisting outcomes: 16 April 2014

Interviews: 19 - 21 May 2014

Funding approvals process (RC, Council, CEO and Minister): June 2014

Notification of outcomes to applicants: July 2014*

*dates are indicative and subject to change.
1 About this Document

The Research Fellowships Peer Review Guidelines for funding commencing in 2015 (the Guidelines) describe the general process, procedures and timeline for peer reviewing applications for Research Fellowships. They also contain important information about the conduct of peer review.

These Guidelines complement the Research Fellowships Funding Rules for funding commencing in 2015 (the Funding Rules), which were made available to applicants to assist them in preparing and submitting their applications. It is important that these Guidelines are read in conjunction with the Funding Rules. The Funding Rules contain essential information about the aims of the Research Fellowship scheme, eligibility, the application process and other relevant matters.

2 Changes to the Peer Review Process

- Initial scoring and Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) process has been introduced at the shortlisting stage (see section 5.8.2 Preliminary Scoring of Applications).

3 Conduct during Peer Review


3.1 Career Disruptions

Peer reviewers will need to take into account any career disruptions experienced by applicants. Please refer to the NHMRC Funding Rules subsection 3.7.1, for further details.

3.1.1 Sensitive Career Disruption

If the Career Disruption is of a highly sensitive nature, the applicant may not wish to share specific information with the Peer Review Panel and may have submitted details separately to NHMRC. For example, an applicant may consider their medical condition to be of a personal nature and therefore may wish to submit a Career Disruption claim separately.

Senior staff at NHMRC will review the sensitive career disruption claim. If the claim has been accepted, they will advise the panel on the period of time affected by the disruption.

Details may also be provided of how the disruption may have affected the applicant’s track record.

4 Peer Review Participants

Participants in the peer review process are identified in the Peer Review Participants table below, including a description of their roles and responsibilities. Following the peer review process, key participants in the peer review process will be publicly acknowledged on the NHMRC website without reference to the specific application(s) that they assessed.
### 4.1 Peer Review Participants Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **4.1.1 Research Committee Portfolio Representative** | The Research Committee Portfolio Representative is a member of NHMRC Research Committee. Their primary duties and responsibilities are to:  
• identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications;  
• provide advice to the Chairs to ensure consistency in assessment approaches across Panels;  
• along with the NHMRC and Chairs, monitor progress and contribute to finding solutions for any problems that may arise; and  
• support NHMRC staff as they implement policy and follow established procedures. |
| **4.1.2 Community Observer**               | During Peer Review Panel discussions, independent Observers may be present to:  
• monitor procedural aspects of the PRP’s conduct; and  
• provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures.  
Observers will be briefed on the peer review process. They will not participate in the discussion of any application. |
| **4.1.3 Peer Review Panel Chair**         | The primary duties and responsibilities of the Panel Chair are to ensure NHMRC’s procedures are adhered to and that a fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being reviewed by the PRP. Chairs are appointed to be independent of the review of research proposals, and must manage the process of peer review in accordance with these guidelines. The Chair will:  
• familiarise themselves with documentation relevant to the funding scheme;  
• identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications assigned to the PRP;  
• confirm all CoI rulings and ensure appropriate action is taken in relation to declared CoIs;  
• familiarise themselves with ALL applications being considered by the PRP, excluding those for which they have declared CoI;  
• confirm the assignment of applications to PRPs and allocation of Spokespersons to applications;  
• ensure consistency when reviewing Indigenous health external assessments;  
• chair the PRP meetings;  
• keep discussion on time and focussed;  
• ensure procedures are followed;  
• assist panel members in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities;  
• promote good engagement by Spokesperson and panel members;  
• ensure that discussion leads to an outcome where the application is scored against the assessment criteria or deemed to be non-competitive. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ensure that discussion of applications under review include the consideration of additional awards where relevant;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ensure consistency across discussions and interviews; in consultation with the NHMRC, confirm applications identified as being non-competitive;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• endorse the review and scoring of applications;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• approve relevant Meeting Attendance Record sheets; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• along with other Panel Chairs, review applications for One Year Extension for Retiring Fellows;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.5 Primary Spokesperson (1SP)</td>
<td>The primary duties and responsibilities of a 1SP are to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• lead the PRP meeting discussion/interview on the competitiveness of the application against the aims of the scheme and the assessment criteria;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ensure productivity relative to opportunity and career are properly considered; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• formulate questions to be addressed by the applicants and ensure that they are addressed at interview;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **4.1.6 Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)** | The primary duties and responsibilities of a 2SP are to:  
- support the application discussion at the PRP meeting on the competitiveness of the application against the aims of the scheme and the assessment criteria;  
- ensure productivity relative to opportunity and career disruptions are properly considered; and  
- formulate questions to be addressed by the applicants and ensure that they are addressed at interview; |
| **4.1.7 Additional Experts** | Additional Experts with research expertise and experience in the specific field(s) of an application may be appointed to provide advice at PRP meetings or interviews. Additional Experts do not participate in scoring of applications and must identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications assigned to them. Additional Experts may:  
- provide advice to the PRP regarding the context of the applicant’s research field and their standing in that field; and  
- provide advice to the PRP on the applicant’s track record and the competitiveness of the application based on the applicant’s current stage in their career. |
| **4.1.8 Senior NHMRC Staff** | NHMRC staff with doctoral degrees or extensive research expertise will be involved in  
- establishing peer review panels;  
- reviewing allocations of applications to panels and Spokespersons;  
- assisting and advising on the peer review process; and  
- acting as an alternative independent chair when the Panel Chair and RC Portfolio Representative has a CoI with the application under consideration. |
| **4.1.9 NHMRC Staff** | Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and may be responsible for the conduct of the following specific activities.  
- approach potential panel members;  
- assign applications to the appropriate panels;  
- assign spokespersons to applications;  
- provide the following administrative support and advice to the Chair and panel members:  
  - facilitate use of RGMS;  
  - maintain accurate records of CoIs;  
  - ensure that the Chair has approved all CoIs declared by members;  
  - provide advice on the treatment of declared CoI;  
  - provide policy advice to the Panel Chair and panel members;  
  - ensure that all panel members/assessors are provided with the |
necessary information to review each application;
• prepare a list of non-competitive applications for consideration by the Chair and panel members;
• prepare the order in which applications will be accessed during PRP meetings;
• maintain scoring records for each application;
• record outcome of PRP recommendations;
• act as the first point of contact for panel members and community observers;
• consider recommendations from observers to improve peer review procedures/processes; and
• record and notify NHMRC Senior Staff of any requests for clarification or advice.

4.2 Peer Review Panels

Peer Review Panels are established to review all Research Fellowship applications in fields of research as outlined in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Includes the fields of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Biochemistry, Immunology, Virology, Oncology/Cancer Biology, Gastroenterology, Cellular and Developmental Biology, Microbiology, Parasitology, Infectious Diseases and Genetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Physiology, Reproductive Medicine/Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Neuroscience/Vision Sciences, Pharmacology/Respiratory Medicine, Endocrinology/Diabetes (includes obesity) and Cardiovascular Disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Epidemiology/Population Health, Health Services Research, Applied Statistics and Clinical Sciences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each Panel is composed of an independent Chair and members (the number depending on the number of applications assigned to each panel). Where required, Expert and/or Additional Members in specified fields will be called upon. An NHMRC Staff member will be assigned to assist with the panel administration.

Panel members are chosen for their expertise and experience. Geographical spread, gender balance and institutional representation are also considered when determining each panel’s membership. Members should currently hold, or have held, a health or medical research grant obtained through a nationally or internationally competitive peer review process. Members are appointed for one year, and are generally not reappointed for more than three consecutive years.

Current RF applicants are not permitted to participate in the assessment process as panel members.

Follow the allocation of applications to PRPs and identification of CoIs, if the NHMRC or Panel Chairs consider that the Panel membership requires augmentation, additional members with specific expertise will be identified and appointed.

In the event of a panel member withdrawing from the peer review process, the NHMRC will, if time permits, replace them with another member possessing appropriate expertise relevant to the PRP. If a replacement member cannot be found, the NHMRC will reallocate the application(s) within the relevant PRP, ensuring that the expertise required for each application is appropriately represented. If the panel member is contactable after withdrawing from the process, the NHMRC may contact the member with queries relating to the applications originally allocated to them.

4.2.1 Quorum

A quorum must be present for an application to be reviewed and scored. For the purposes of PRP...
meetings a quorum is one member more than half the total number of panel members. NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to PRP meetings, those applications that do not have a quorum and obtain a suitably qualified temporary panel member to participate in the discussion and scoring on that application. Temporary panel members may be drawn from other panels.

5 Peer Review Process

The NHMRC peer review is expected to provide a rigorous, fair, transparent and consistent assessment of the merits of each application in keeping with NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/peer-review/nhmrc-principles-peer-review and the Code.

Peer review of Research Fellowships is a two stage process with an initial review and shortlisting of applications, followed by shortlisted applicants proceeding to interview.

5.1 Receipt and Initial Processing of Applications

NHMRC staff will verify that Research Fellowship applications meet eligibility criteria.

5.2 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Research Assessment

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples health will be identified by information provided by the applicant in their application.

Those applications identified will be subject to NHMRC’s Criteria for Health and Medical Research of Indigenous Australians (Attachment A). The extent to which the application fulfils these criteria in relation to research into the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be considered by a suitable external assessor with appropriate expertise, and also take into consideration the applicants’ track record relative to opportunity.

5.3 Assignment of Applications to PRPs

Applicants will indicate which specific field of research or particular stream best fits their application. Based on this information, Senior NHMRC Staff will allocate applications to the most appropriate PRP. These allocations are confirmed by the panel chairs.

5.4 Identification of CoI

Panel members will be provided access, via NHMRCs Research Grants Management System (RGMS) to the Snapshot Summary Report of each application assigned to the PRP, and will declare their CoI in accordance with the guidance on the management of CoI, provided at www.nhmrc.gov.au.

Panel members will be given access to the full application only if they have no or a low CoI. Where panel members declare they have a high CoI, they will not be granted access to the full details of the application.

Some members may have a CoI for which they require a ruling. For these, NHMRC will assess the information declared and specify in RGMS the level of participation applicable. All CoI rulings will be confirmed and endorsed by the Panel Chair during the interview week. Panel members are requested to ensure they include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate CoI assessment can be made.

CoIs must be declared at the beginning of the peer review process. However CoIs may be declared at any stage of the peer review process if new conflicts become apparent.

CoI guidelines also apply to Observers and they must be aware of their obligations under NHMRC’s Guidance for management of CoI. Observers must advise NHMRC of any real or potential CoIs they have with an application.

5.5 Allocation of Spokespersons

Panel members will indicate their ability to act as a spokesperson on applications based on their
expertise. NHMRC staff will allocate spokespersons to each application based on the indicated suitability and declared conflicts of interest of each panel member. Panel members will be notified of their allocations accordingly.

As far as possible, each Panel Member will be allocated an equal proportion of applications as Primary and Secondary Spokesperson.

Panel members should read ALL applications for their panel carefully, but pay particular attention to those for which they are 1SP and 2SP.

5.6 PRP Members Access to Applications

Panel members will be provided with full access to applications allocated to their panel, within RGMS, excluding those where a high CoI has been declared. When accessing the full application, panel members should again check whether they have a CoI not previously evident, and notify NHMRC if additional conflicts are identified.

The “Download All” function, in RGMS, streamlines panel members access to all relevant application documentation. Panel members can download all relevant documents using this functionality rather than reading applications individually through RGMS.

In order to assess an application, the panel members should review the following ‘Snapshot Reports’ and uploaded PDF documents:

- ‘Assessor’ snapshot (relevant sections of the application and Profile/CV required to assess the application);
- Uploaded document - ‘Grant Proposal’ PDF.

5.7 Review of Retiring Fellows

The Research Fellowships Peer Review Panel Chairs will review applications for a One Year Extension of Fellowship for Retiring Fellows.

Applications will be reviewed for their intent to remain research active for the following year at a level commensurate with the applicants current Research Fellowship. This review will be conducted via email with a teleconference discussion only if required.

The outcomes for this review will be either:

- Applications clearly deemed to have met the requirements for “Retiring Fellows” will be included in the final funding recommendation; or
- Applications clearly deemed NOT to have met the requirements for “Retiring Fellows” will not be considered further for funding.

Applicants for a One Year Extension of Fellowship for Retiring Fellows are not subject to further peer review and will be advised of the outcome of their applications after the final recommendations are approved.

5.8 Part One – Initial Review of Applications

All applications are subject to the same peer review process and assessment criteria. The initial review and final rankings are established on merit, regardless of the applicant’s previous fellowship status.

Panel members must use the Statement of Expectations at Attachment B as a guide when assessing the level of applications.
Should an applicant who has the title ‘Professor’, wish to apply at SRF level, they are required to submit a justification as part of their application explaining why appointment at this lower level is more appropriate for their situation. This is to be considered by the panel as part of the peer review process at the shortlisting of applications. If the panel feels the applicant does not provide adequate justification, taking into consideration relative to opportunity, they must reflect this in their scores against the assessment criteria.

5.8.1 General Guidelines for Shortlisting

Due to the competitive nature of the Research Fellowships scheme, only approximately 50% of applications will be shortlisted.

Funding data for previous rounds are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of applications received</th>
<th>Number of applications that proceeded to interview</th>
<th>Number funded</th>
<th>Percentage of the total number of applicants who applied who were successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel members must critically examine all applications for competitiveness against the aims of the scheme, the Assessment Criteria (Attachment C) and the Statement of Expectations (Attachment B). Applications considered marginal should not be shortlisted.

5.8.2 Preliminary Scoring of Applications

The 1SP and 2SP for each application will provide a score, using a seven point scale, against each assessment criterion in RGMS with the assistance of the Scoring Descriptors (Attachment D) and the Statement of Expectations (Attachment B).

The PRP will be provided with detailed instructions on how to complete the preliminary shortlisting scores in RGMS.

5.8.3 Confirmation of Applications Not For Further Consideration

The Spokespersons’ scores will facilitate the identification of applications considered to be the least competitive of those assessed by each PRP. The bottom 50% will be included on the Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list.

A NFFC list, catering for conflicts of interest, will be provided to panel members prior to the shortlisting teleconference. If a panel member feels strongly that an application warrants rescuing from the NFFC list (and should proceed to interview), they have an opportunity to nominate one application only for consideration by the panel.

A list of applications nominated by panel members for rescue, catering for conflicts of interest, will be circulated to the panel prior to the teleconference. These will be the only applications discussed by the panel at the teleconference.

The Panel Chair will review all applications appearing on the NFFC list to confirm no application has scores from the Spokespersons which are two or more points away from each other. If an application receives scores from the Spokesperson this varied, the application must be discussed at the teleconference.

Applications not appearing on the NFFC list will automatically proceed to interview.

If the panel is satisfied that the most suitable applications are proceeding to interview and no applications have been nominated for rescue, the shortlisting teleconference will not be required.

5.8.4 Process for the Shortlisting Teleconference

Each panel will meet, via teleconference, to discuss any applications from the NFFC list which had
been nominated for rescue and any application where the variation between the two spokespersons scores is two or more.

Panel members who have nominated an application for rescue will have to speak to the application and provide a justification for the application to proceed. The 1SP and 2SP will also speak to the application and recommend if the application should proceed or not. For an application to be rescued from the NFFC list the entire panel must be in agreement. The panel must decide on no more than two applications to proceed to interview.

At the shortlisting stage, for Initial Application at SRF, the decision to shortlist is to be based on whether, at a minimum, the applicant is competitive at SRF A. The decision on whether a fellowship is to be awarded at SRF A or SRF B will be made post interview based on final rankings.

For Reapplications with Promotion the decision to shortlist is to be based on whether an applicant is competitive at their current level. The promotion request will be addressed at interview and the level to be funded will be determined post interview based on final rankings.

For applications for Promotion out of Synchrony (POS) will be assessed at the level of promotion. POS applicants are not assessed at their current level. If the Panel’s final decision is that the application should not be supported at the promoted level, then they will be removed from further processing. The applicant will continue at their existing level for the duration of their current fellowship.

5.9 Part Two – Applications proceeding to further Peer Review

5.9.1 Interviews

Interviews for Research Fellowships will be held from 19 – 21 May 2014 and will be conducted by telephone. NHMRC will hold a panel briefing prior to interviews to outline the process, and roles and responsibilities of all participants. Interviewees have the opportunity to provide a one-page single sided CV update. Any additional pages submitted by the applicant will not be provided to the panel. NHMRC will forward all CV updates received, to the panel prior to interviews.

A total of 40 minutes has been allocated for the discussion and interview of each application, 10 minutes for a pre interview panel discussion, 20 minute interview with the applicant, and finally 10 minutes post-interview for panel discussion and scoring. Panel Chairs must manage the time allocation for all applicants to ensure each is given an equal opportunity to state their case and to ensure that the interview schedule is maintained.

A Community Observer may be present during individual interviews to monitor the procedural aspects of the PRP and to provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures.

5.9.2 Conduct during Interviews

The purpose of the interview is for both the applicant and panel members to identify optimum evidence to warrant funding for an application. Panel members will be assessing how well an application meets the assessment criteria and are expected to encourage and assist applicants to present their case in the best light. They should not to be confrontational, negative or accusatory, or put applicants in a position where they feel they have to defend what they have done or are proposing to do.

Panels are expected to be direct and obvious in what they ask, so applicants should be able to respond equally clearly and not be looking for traps or hidden aspects to questions.

There may be aspects of an application about which the panel members are perfectly satisfied, based on the information already provided. Because there is limited time available for interviews, it is unnecessary for the panel to explore these details further.

Panels will need to explore aspects of an application where they require clarification or confirmation, however applicants should view such enquiries as opportunities and invitations to throw light on or emphasise the worth of the case they are making, and not as criticisms.

A guide for applicants and panel members, “What to Expect at a Research Fellowship Interview” is provided at Attachment E.
All interviews will follow the Research Fellowships Interview Run Sheet (Attachment E) to ensure procedural consistency is maintained.

5.9.3 Procedure for Ranking Applicants

After each interview, the application will be discussed by the panel and scored with the assistance of the Research Fellowships Scoring Descriptors (Attachment D) and the Statement of Expectations (Attachment B) as required. Where applicable, the PRP should make a recommendation for the award of a Research Fellowship SEO and/or Trans Tasman Award. It is important that the PRP consider the merits of the application in relation to the scoring descriptors rather than whether the applicant is considered fundable.

Panel members will score each applicant on a seven point scale against each assessment criterion. Scores will be provided via secret ballot after the 1SP has declared their scores to the panel. All secret ballot sheets will be destroyed once scores are accurately transcribed to the scoresheet.

An average panel score is determined for each criterion and the relevant weighting applied. Each weighted panel score is combined to provide an overall score for the applicant.

Dual ranking of applications is required for the following categories:

- Initial Application applying at the general level of SRF must be ranked at SRF A and SRF B levels; and
- Reapplication with Promotion must be ranked at the applicant’s current level and the requested promoted level.

5.9.4 Daily Panel Review

At the end of each day of interviews, the PRP should briefly review the day’s interviews, but not for the purpose of re-scoring and re-ranking. This is to ensure that equity is maintained between applicants in relation to time spent discussing each application. The PRP may wish to flag an application which will require further discussion at the conclusion of all interviews.

5.9.5 Final Ranking

On the last day of interviews a preliminary ranked list is created for each panel, based on the overall score of each applicant interviewed. Each panel member must agree on the ranking of applicants on the preliminary ranked list, and typically, adjustments should only be made for applicants with the same overall score.

Any changes to rank order must be with the consensus of the panel. If the panel decides to alter the ranking of an application, the panel must agree on a revised score against the relevant selection criterion and adjust accordingly. This process is essential to ensure the transparency and integrity of peer review. The final ranked list will be confirmed and endorsed by the Panel Chair.

Once all panels have agreed on a ranked list for the applicants they interviewed, applicant’s scores are normalised across all panels. These normalised final scores are used as the base for producing a final ranked list for all Research Fellowship applicants interviewed, which will be used in preparing the funding recommendations for Research Committee.

Applicants are funded at the highest ranked fellowship level above the funding line.

NHMRC will seek advice from its Research Committee and Council on the allocation of expenditure for the Fellowships. Research Committee and Council do not challenge the scores or relative ranking of applications as determined by the PRP. In accordance with Subsection 7(1)(c) of the NHMRC Act, the CEO accepts Council’s recommendation (as advised by Research Committee) and then formally seeks the Minister with portfolio responsibility for NHMRC’s approval to expend public money from the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA).
5.10 Notification of Outcomes

5.10.1 Outcome Letters

Outcomes of application rounds will be formally announced by the Minister or his/her representative. Applicants and RAOs will be notified via electronic letter of the outcomes of the peer review process. This letter will provide information regarding the results of the peer review process. Funding schedules will be provided for all successful applicants.

5.10.2 Feedback Reports

Feedback will be provided to applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary. This summary will include the applicants score against each selection criterion, and their overall score and percentage quartile.

Applicants who were not shortlisted (section 5.8) will receive a report of their outcome after the list of applications proceeding to final review has been finalised. All other applicants will receive their report attached to their outcome letter.
Criteria for Health and Medical Research of Indigenous Australians

Applicants are required to address the extent to which their application fulfils these criteria in relation to research into the health of Indigenous Australians including documentation and other relevant written evidence where appropriate.

The criteria are:

- Community engagement
- Benefit
- Sustainability and transferability
- Building capability
- Priority
- Significance

Community engagement
The proposal demonstrates how the project has had and will have 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 proposal demonstrates the potential health benefit of the project for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Benefit need not necessarily be direct or immediate.

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. In considering this issue the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.

Building capability
The proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal communities, researchers and others will develop relevant capabilities through participation in the project.

Priority
The research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities either at community, regional or national levels.

Significance
The research addresses an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Statement of Expectations

The Statement of Expectations outline broad activities, attributes and achievements within the levels of the Research Fellowships scheme. In coming to decisions about relative merit of applicants for these positions, assessors will consider research track record relative to opportunity. Applicants should note the Scoring Descriptors which identify quality of research and associated outcomes. The list of Scoring Descriptors is meant to be indicative rather than exhaustive.

Applicants for a Research Fellowship at all levels will be expected to articulate a vision for their research for the next 5 years and to provide convincing evidence of their intellectual leadership in their field. The quality of their research outputs, including publications, patents and any evidence for translation into practice of their work, will be a primary consideration in the assessment of their application for a Fellowship. Similarly, the level of success in obtaining grant funding and their National and International research profile will be major determinants of the outcome of an application for Fellowship. Supervision of research students, mentoring and peer review and research administrative activities will also be factors impacting on the competitiveness of an application.

Senior Research Fellow

SRF A

General Standard:
To be competitive for award of a Fellowship at SRF A level, an applicant will have provided convincing evidence that he/she has independently conceived and conducted original research and regularly published research findings in high quality peer review international journals, independently or as part of a research team. The Fellow is expected to continue to develop relevant research expertise and research group leadership.

SRF B

General Standard:
To be competitive for award of a Fellowship at SRF B level, an applicant will have provided convincing evidence that he/she has independently conceived and conducted original research and regularly published research findings in high quality peer review international journals. The Fellow is expected to be making independent and original contributions and to exercise leadership in influencing research directions and outcomes. In addition, the Fellow will be contributing significantly to their profession and to research training.

Principal Research Fellow

General Standard:
A Principal Research Fellow is expected to be making substantial and major contributions to research through high quality publication and other communication of their original research findings. In addition, they will be making significant contributions to their profession and discipline and to research training. This level of award recognises marked distinction in the Fellow’s research and scholarship.

Senior Principal Research Fellow

General Standard:
A Senior Principal Research Fellow will be recognised as a leading authority in a research area and will have made substantial and highly original contributions to the area. The Fellow is expected to exercise special responsibility in providing leadership and in fostering excellence in research. They will play a leading role within their profession or discipline in research training in their organisation or institution and within the scholarly and general community.
Research Fellowships Assessment Criteria

Section 5 of the Research Fellowship Funding Rules, provide the criteria against which Fellowship applications will be reviewed. A brief summary of the criteria for these schemes is provided below.

Aims
The Research Fellowships Scheme aims to recruit and support Australia’s very best medical and health research talent in full-time research during the most productive years of their research life to further develop as leaders in their field and contribute to the Australian research community through active participation.

A critical objective of the scheme is to foster an intellectual environment which supports and builds the capacity of Australian research for the future and in so doing, creates knowledge through investment in research which improves health and thus contributes to Australia’s prosperity.

Assessment Criteria
All applicants will be assessed and ranked against the Assessment Criteria listed below and on how well their application meets the aims of the scheme. All criteria are assessed relative to opportunity.

- Vision for the next five years.
- Quality of Research Output (with particular emphasis on the past five years and demonstrating an upward trajectory) and intellectual leadership, including success in obtaining grants, national and international profile.
- Contribution to research through research supervision, mentoring, peer review and research administration relative to opportunity.
## RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS SCORING DESCRIPTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criterion 1</th>
<th>Criterion 2</th>
<th>Criterion 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VISION</td>
<td>RESEARCH OUTPUT AND LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vision for the next 5 years (in alignment with the aims of the scheme).</td>
<td>Quality of Research Output (with particular emphasis on the past five years and demonstrating an upward trajectory) and intellectual leadership, including success in obtaining grants and national and international profile.</td>
<td>Contribution to research through research supervision, mentoring, peer review and research administration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weight 25%*  
*Weight 60%*  
*Weight 15%*

The following scoring descriptors are to be used as a guide to score an application against each of the assessment criteria. The descriptors are indicative rather than exhaustive. Evaluation of performance will take into account opportunity, research discipline and be an overall summation of research contribution.

### 7

An exceptionally strong application which clearly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria, with essentially no weaknesses.

It is expected that only the top 2% of applications would be ranked in this category.

#### Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Presents a highly innovative research proposal that is transformative and achievable within the term of the Fellowship.
- Presents a research proposal that addresses an issue of utmost importance to human health and will have a very significant impact.
- Demonstrates a clear vision which will advance the field and expand Australia’s research capacity in this area.

#### Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Is highly recognised, or has emerging high recognition internationally for their contribution to their field of research.
- Has consistently published research that is highly influential.
- Has a demonstrated clear, rapid and continuing upward trajectory for research output.
- Has demonstrated a multidisciplinary and strong collaborative approach to research.
- Has had consistent success in obtaining major international and/or national grants as CIA.
- Has given several key plenary presentations at major international meetings.
- Has received major international recognition for research outcomes.

#### Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Has extensive evidence of primary supervision and mentoring of PhD candidates (or equivalent) with successful completions.
- Has had extensive involvement in the peer review of grants both nationally and internationally.
- Has extensive experience in the review of publications, including editorial roles in top international journals.
- Holds leadership positions in highly regarded international scientific or professional societies.
- Has demonstrated clear evidence of key contributions to the profession, including public communication/advocacy; government advisory roles and clinical practice.
- Has a significant leadership role.
6
A very strong application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, with only some minor weaknesses.

It is expected that the next 3-5% of applications would be ranked in this category or above.

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Presents an innovative proposal that has the potential to be transformative and is likely to be achieved within the term of the Fellowship.
- Presents a research proposal that addresses an issue of major importance to human health and will have a strong impact.
- Demonstrates a vision which is likely to advance the field and expand Australia’s research capacity in this area.

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Has an established national and growing international reputation for their contribution to their field of research.
- Has published research that is highly influential.
- Has demonstrated upward trajectory for research output.
- Has demonstrated a multidisciplinary approach to research with good collaborations.
- Has had success in obtaining major international and/or national grants as CIA.
- Has been an invited speaker at several major international meetings.
- Has received major national recognition for research outcomes.

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Has strong evidence of primary supervision and mentoring of PhD candidates or equivalent with successful completions.
- Has had major involvement in the peer review of grants nationally, and some internationally.
- Has very good experience in the review of publications, including editorial roles in discipline specific journals.
- Holds leadership positions in well regarded scientific or professional societies.
- Has demonstrated evidence of key contributions to the profession, including public communication/advocacy.
- Has a leadership role within a Departmental Centre or Institute.

5
The application meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria but has identified weakness requiring additional consideration by the panel.

May be considered for interview

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Presents a research proposal that has at least one innovative idea but may not be achieved within the term of the Fellowship.
- Presents a research proposal that addresses an issue of considerable importance to human health and may have some impact.
- Demonstrates a vision which may advance the applicants field of endeavour.

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Has a good national and emerging international reputation for their contribution to their field of research.
- Has published research that is influential.
- Has the beginning of an upward trajectory for research output.
- Has demonstrated a good collaborative approach to research.
- Has had success in obtaining major national grants as CIA
- Has been an invited speaker at major national meetings.
- Has received national recognition for

Relative to opportunity the applicant:
- Has evidence of primary supervision and some mentoring of PhD candidates or equivalent with successful completions.
- Has had considerable involvement in the peer review of grants nationally and occasionally internationally.
- Has very good experience in the review of publications but with no editorial roles identified.
- Holds minor role(s) in professional societies (senior office bearer or meeting organiser, editorial board responsibility).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>The application only partly meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Should not proceed to further peer review.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</td>
<td>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presents a research proposal that has some novel aspects, but predominately extends existing knowledge.</td>
<td>- Has a growing national reputation for their contribution to their field of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presents a research proposal that addresses an issue of some importance to human health and may have some impact.</td>
<td>- Has published research that makes specialised contributions to knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has a developing vision of their contribution to their field of endeavour.</td>
<td>- Has the potential to have an upward trajectory in research output.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has demonstrated emerging collaborative activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has had some success in obtaining major national grants but not necessarily as CIA or grant funding is primarily from specialist agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has presented orally at national meetings but not as an invited speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has received some recognition for research outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The application does not meet the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Should not proceed to further peer review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recommended for Interview</td>
<td>Not recommended for Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</td>
<td>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presents a research proposal that has relatively little novelty and is not particularly innovative.</td>
<td>- Is developing a national reputation for their contribution to their field of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Proposed a research proposal that addresses an issue of some concern to human health and may have some impact.</td>
<td>- Has published research that sustains the knowledge base of the discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Plays an important role in the research but is not a driver for the project vision.</td>
<td>- Has little evidence to suggest an upward trajectory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has little evidence of collaborative activities outside of their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has had some success in obtaining national grants from specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Fellowships Peer Review Guidelines for funding commencing in 2015
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>The application does not meet the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Should not proceed to further peer review. Not recommended for Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The application does not meet the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Should not proceed to further peer review. Not recommended for Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Research Fellowships Peer Review Guidelines for funding commencing in 2015 |
|---|---|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presents a research proposal that follows previously well documented and studied concepts.</td>
<td>Has demonstrated little evidence of a developing reputation for their contribution to their field of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed a research proposal that addresses an issue of only marginal concern to human health and is unlikely to yield a significant impact.</td>
<td>Has published research that has had some contribution to the knowledge base of the discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is key but not necessarily the lead in the vision of the research proposal</td>
<td>Has not demonstrated an upward trajectory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has received grants funding primarily from local institutional sources rather than competitive grant funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has little or no evidence for oral presentations at meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presents a research proposal that is not innovative or significant.</td>
<td>Does not have a reputation for their contribution to their field of research outside their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed a research proposal that does not address an issue of concern to human health.</td>
<td>Has published some research that has had little impact on the knowledge base of the discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated little or no evidence of a research vision.</td>
<td>Has little evidence of research independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has received minimal grant funding from local institution sources rather than competitive grant funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has no evidence of presentations at meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has some evidence of minor involvement in supervision of PhD candidates or equivalent.</td>
<td>Has had little involvement in the peer review of grants nationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has little experience in the review of publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holds membership of some professional societies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has a leadership role within a research team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relative to opportunity the applicant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has demonstrated little evidence of other key contributions to the profession, including public communication/advocacy.</td>
<td>Has a leadership role within a research laboratory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has received little recognition for research outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What to expect at a Research Fellowships interview

Applications will be assessed against the specified aims of the scheme and the assessment criteria. The Scoring Descriptors and Statement of Expectations provide guidance for the panel while assessing and scoring an application. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these documents in preparation for their interview.

Applicants have been given the opportunity to provide a one page single sided update of their CV for the Panel. This document should highlight only those updates which are relevant since the time of submitting the application. Only one page is to be provided – any additional pages will not be considered.

Forty minutes have been allocated for each interview, of which 20 minutes will be dedicated to a discussion with the applicant. During this discussion, the panel will explore aspects of an application which may need clarification. Panel members are expected to encourage and assist the applicant to present their case in the best light.

Panel members with a high level conflict of interest will not present or participate in any discussions/interviews relevant to the identified application.

The panel will hold a 10 minute pre interview discussion where the primary spokesperson will summarise the application, identifying any concerns to be addressed with the applicant and will highlight any relative to opportunity and career disruptions to be considered during the assessment of the application. The secondary spokesperson, followed by the rest of the panel, is provided with the opportunity to raise issues they feel should also be considered.

Interview Process

The applicant is welcomed to the interview by the Panel Chair who will introduce the Panel Members, identifying the spokespersons for that application.

The Panel Chair will ask the applicant to give a 3 minute summary of their application and vision for the next five years. It is important for applicants to be mindful of time, if an applicant goes over time it may restrict opportunities for the panel to explore other issues important to the assessment of the application. The Panel Chair will warn applicants when the time limit is approaching.

Applicants may choose to highlight

- the expected outcomes at the end of the 5 year fellowship;
- the quality of their research output (publications, patents, research translation);
- their national/international recognition (publications, invitations etc);
- their intellectual leadership;
- their mentoring, training and supervision of Post docs and PhD/Research students and the achievements of these students.
- their peer review activities, involvement in professional societies and the community.

The primary spokesperson will lead the discussion with the applicant, with the support of the secondary spokesperson, followed by the rest of the panel. All questions will address the assessment criteria:

- Vision;
- Research Output and Leadership; and
- Contribution to Research.

At the end of the interview, the Panel Chair will ask the applicant to provide a brief summary statement which should include any important issues the applicant considers has not been addressed during the interview.

Once the applicant has left the interview, the panel will evaluate the application and interview, and provide a score against the assessment criteria via secret ballot.

Please note: Additional information pertaining to the application will not be accepted nor provided to the panel after the interview has concluded.
NHMRC Research Fellowships Interview Run Sheet

**Pre-Interview Discussion (10 Minutes)**

- Chair to announce declared conflicts of interest
- Highly conflicted panel members to leave the room
- Chair to introduce the application with all relevant details –
  - App ID, Name, Institute, Level to be interviewed, Name of 1SP and Name of 2SP
  - Secretariat to confirm level(s) to be scored
- Chair to ask for any newly identified conflicts of interest
- Chair to remind the panel if applicant has applied for a Support Enhancement Option or Trans Tasman Award
- Chair to remind the panel if applicant has indigenous focus
- Chair to remind the spokespersons to identify any relative to opportunity considerations or career disruptions
- 1SP to present a summary/analysis of the application strengths and weaknesses
- 2SP to raise any additional concerns
- All Panel members given opportunity for open discussion
- 1SP to clarify who will raise specific issues during the interview

**Applicant Interview (20 minutes)**

- Chair to dial the contact number provided by the applicant
- Chair to welcome the applicant and determine if applicant is ready for interview
- Chair to ask panel members to identify themselves
- Chair to confirm sound clarity with applicant and identify spokespersons
- Chair to ask applicant to provide a 3 minute summary of their vision for the next five years
- Spokespersons to ask questions relevant to assessment criteria and in line with pre interview discussion
- All panel members given opportunity to ask question relevant to assessment criteria
- Chair to ask applicant to provide a summary statement including any issues considered important by the applicant which were not addressed by the panel
- Chair to ask applicant feedback on telephone interview process and confirm connection was clear

**Post interview discussion and Scoring (10 minutes)**

- Spokespersons to provide final comments on interview and application in relation to the assessment criteria
- Chair to invite other panel members to comment if required
- 1SP to declare their score for each assessment criterion
- Chair to invite panel to address any concerns with the 1SP score (especially if scoring 2 or more away from 1SP score)
- Panel members to clearly record their scores for each assessment criterion in-confidence on ballot slip provided
- Secretariat to collect ballot slips from panel members and enter scores into score sheet