THE PROJECT GRANTS NOT FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION PROCESS FOR 2015 AND OUTCOME DATA FROM 2011-2014

Purpose of the NFFC Process
The Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) process identifies the least competitive applications received by NHMRC, based on the scores provided by the primary and secondary spokespersons. The process occurs after receipt of the applicants’ response (rebuttal) to Assessors’ reports. Since less than 20% of applications are expected to be funded in 2015 (14.9% in 2014, 16.9% in 2013), the NFFC process identifies the least competitive 50% of applications, allowing Grant Review Panels (GRPs) to focus on the most competitive applications at their face-to-face meeting.

Project Grants
The Project Grants scheme is NHMRC’s largest funding scheme. In 2014, NHMRC received 3810 Project Grant applications. Of the 3810 applications received, 99 were seeking funding from external organisations, and 11 were withdrawn before they could be assessed by a GRP. Of the remaining 3700 applications assessed, 14.9% of applications were funded.

Project Grant applications are assessed against three assessment criteria: Scientific Quality; Significance of the Expected Outcomes and/or Innovation of the Concept; and Team Quality and Capability relevant to the application - relative to opportunity, taking into account career disruptions, where applicable.

NHMRC relies on the participation of the research community to continue to ensure that every application receives expert review. NHMRC’s Research Committee recognises that to ensure the best applications are funded, GRPs must be as effective and efficient as possible.

NFFC Processes
Previously
In 2010, the NFFC process was introduced to remove the bottom 30% of applications prior to full discussion by the GRP as a way of reducing the number of applications that GRP members had to review in detail. In 2011, 2012 and 2013, the NFFC process captured the least competitive third (33%) of applications, noting that approximately 80% of applications will not be funded. In 2014, the NFFC process captured the bottom half of applications (50% NFFC).

Prior to 2014, applications that were ranked as a notional category 5, based on spokespersons scores, were exempt from the NFFC process and underwent full discussion by the GRP, as were all applications addressing
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health. In 2014, Category 5 applications were included on the NFFC list, unless they were New Investigator or Cancer Australia Young Investigator applications.

Current

Based on current predictions, it is expected that only 10% - 20% of category 5 applications will be able to be funded in 2015. Therefore Category 5 applications will continue to not be excluded from the NFFC list. Exceptions will only be for New Investigator and Cancer Australia Young Investigator applications. Applications which are addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and ranked as notional category 3 or lower will be included in the Indigenous Health Grant Review Panel NFFC list. Further details on inclusion/exclusion criteria for generation of the NFFC list are included at Appendix A.

The NFFC list will be provided to the respective GRPs at least 2-3 weeks prior to their meeting. Each GRP member will then be given an opportunity to nominate one application from the NFFC list that should progress through the peer review process.

NFFC Data 2011-14

The table below identifies the total number of applications captured through the Project Grants NFFC process from 2011 - 2014 (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Project Grant applications captured through the NFFC process 2011-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Apps*</th>
<th># NFFC</th>
<th>% NFFC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014+</td>
<td>3700</td>
<td>1489</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3909</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3709</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3510</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*number of applications excludes those subsequently withdrawn

+ Introduction of 50% NFFC in 2014
Appendix A:

2015 Not for Further Consideration Information for Applicants

In 2015, the Project Grants Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) process will continue to identify the least competitive 50% of applications. In addition to scores provided by the Primary (1SP) and Secondary (2SP) spokesperson, the following factors will determine compilation of the 2015 NFFC list:

Scoring protocols

- Only 1SP and 2SP scores (for each criterion) to be used to calculate the notional overall score for the application, following 1SP and 2SP consideration of Assessor reports and the applicant’s response (rebuttal);
- If scores have not been provided by one or both of the SPs, the application will continue through to full peer review.

Placement on the NFFC list

- A ranked list of applications will be prepared by the Office of NHMRC, based solely on the notional overall 1SP & 2SP scores for the application.
- The top 50% of applications on this ranked list progress automatically to full discussion by the Grant Review Panel (GRP). The bottom 50% of applications comprises the “preliminary NFFC list”.
- Applications will be removed from the “preliminary NFFC list” if:
  - the overall scores provided by 1SP and 2SP differ by two or more points, and
  - the notional score of either 1SP or 2SP ordinarily would have placed the application in the top 50% of ranked applications.

For example, a preliminary NFFC list is prepared by the Office of NHMRC for a given GRP.
- The lowest ranked individual application in the top 50% of all applications for this GRP has a notional overall score of 5.300 (based on 1SP and 2SP scores):
- For a different application, 1SP provided an overall notional score of 4.000, and 2SP notionally scored the same application as 6.000.
- However:
  - The notional scores for this application from the 1SP (4.000) and 2SP (6.000) differ by more than 2 points; and
  - The 2SP’s notional score ordinarily would have placed this application in the top 50% and above the “NFFC Cut off” of 5.300.
  - The Office of NHMRC would therefore remove this application from the “preliminary NFFC list” and ensure that it is discussed in full by the GRP.

- Applications assessed as notional Category 3 or lower by the Indigenous Health GRP will be included on the Final NFFC list.
- Applications from New Investigators and Cancer Australia Young Investigators ranked as a notional Category 5 will progress through full peer review. To ensure New Investigators are not disproportionately disadvantaged, NHMRC normally funds a similar rate of new investigators and standard project grants.

Role of the GRP

- The bottom 50% of applications will be determined for each individual panel – individual “final” NFFC lists will be produced for each panel.
- GRP members will receive a Conflict of Interest-adjusted “final” NFFC list after all the above rules have been applied.
- Panel members will continue to have the opportunity to rescue one application from the “final” NFFC list, to proceed through to full peer review.