NHMRC PROJECT GRANTS

PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES

for funding commencing in 2014
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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is provided to assist National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Grant Review Panel (GRP) members in the peer review of Project Grants applications. It covers the period leading up to and occurring during the GRP meetings to be held over six weeks, from 29 July to 6 September 2013, and describes the key steps and procedures involved.

These guidelines complement the NHMRC Funding Rules incorporating the Project Grants scheme for funding commencing in 2014 (the Funding Rules), which contain funding rules that apply to all NHMRC schemes and essential Project Grant scheme-specific information. This includes information about the objectives of the Project Grants scheme, initiatives under the Project Grants scheme, additional eligibility and funding rules, the application process and other relevant matters.

It is important that the guidelines be read in conjunction with the Funding Rules. However, should any uncertainty regarding interpretation of the guidelines arise, the Funding Rules is the prevalent document. Additionally it may prove beneficial to understand the NHMRC Project Grants Advice and Instructions to Applicants for funding commencing in 2014 (Advice and Instructions to Applicants).


2. SUMMARY OF KEY STEPS IN PROJECT GRANTS PEER REVIEW

NHMRC seeks to fund the best and most relevant research to improve the health of all Australians. To ensure this, it is essential that peer review is fair, equitable, transparent and of a high international standard. The Peer Review Guidelines detailed in this document explains the process that is employed to achieve this objective.

An overview of the 2013 Project Grants peer review process is at Attachment A. The following flow chart provides an overview of the key steps in this process:
Summary of Key Steps in Project Grants Peer Review

1. Project Grants Applications close
   - 19 March 2012

2. Allocation of applications to panels
   - Early April

3. GRP members to declare Conflicts of Interest against all applications on panel (approx. 100) - Refer to Section 6.2 Step B of PRG

4. GRP members to nominate 1SP preferences – Refer to Section 6.2 Step C of PRG

5. Applications allocated to Primary (1SP) and Secondary (2SP) Spokespersons
   - End April

6. External Assessor reports due
   - Mid – End May

7. 1SP complete assessment reports and submit preliminary scores against assessment criteria – Refer to Section 6.2 Step E of PRG
   - End May

8. Spokespersons and External Assessors’ (EA) reports provided to applicants
   - End May

9. Applicants submit Applicant Response (“rebuttal”) to Assessors Report – Refer to Section 6.2 Step G of PRG
   - End June

10. 1SP and 2SP revise scores against assessment criteria taking into account Applicant Response and EA comments – Refer to Section 6.2 Step I of PRG
   - Mid July

11. GRP members consider Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list and “rescue” any potentially worthy applications – Refer to Section 6.7 of PRG
   - Mid July

12. GRP members review all applications allocated to their GRP Panel – Refer to Section 6.7 of PRG
   - Mid July

13. 1SP leads GRP members in detailed discussions of applications supplemented by the 2SP – Refer to Section 6.7 Steps 2 & 3 of PRG. Where necessary, Chair leads detailed review of proposed budgets with 2SP commenting on appropriateness – Refer to Section 6.7 Step 6 of PRG
   - 29 July – 06 September

*PRG – “Peer Review Guidelines”
3. CHANGES IN PEER REVIEW PROCESSES FOR 2013

GRP members who have previously participated in NHMRC peer review should note that some processes and procedures have changed. Changes of note include:

1. GRP meetings will be held in Canberra over a period of six weeks, from 29 July to 6 September 2013. The GRP meetings will commence on the Monday of each week at 9:00am.

2. The peer review process for Indigenous health research applications has been revised (see Section 5.2, Section 6.3 and Attachment E).

3. The roles of the Chair and Secondary Spokesperson have changed (see Sections 5.5 and 6.7, Step 6). In 2013, the Chair will lead budget discussions to ensure equity is achieved between applications. With reference to their notes, the 2SP will discuss the proposed budget and comment on the appropriateness of the outlined costs.

4. Nominated non-assessors are automatically declared by NHMRC to be highly conflicted with the application (see Section 6.2, Step A).

5. Information for Young Investigator applications within the Cancer Australia’s Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme (PdCCRS) (see Section 6.5).

6. In addition to the final ranking process, there will also be a daily reconciliation of applications reviewed (see Section 6.7, Step 7 and 8).

7. The NHMRC Project Grants Category Descriptors have been updated and provide GRP members with indicators to guide scoring for each application (see Attachment C).
4. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

GRP members are reminded of the importance of confidentiality and privacy. The disclosure of information about applications and some aspects of peer review processes, for example the identity of members and spokespersons, details of GRP discussion and scoring, may potentially have deleterious consequences (such as adversely impacting on intellectual property rights and professional reputations).

It is a legislated responsibility of all NHMRC staff and Committee members not to disclose to any person confidential information to which they become privy as a result of the exercise of their responsibilities to the NHMRC. Information contained in applications is regarded as confidential unless otherwise indicated, and will be received and treated as confidential by the NHMRC.

Documents containing personal information are handled and protected in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 1988, which sets standards for the collection, storage, use and disclosure of, and access to, personal information. Personal information is disclosed only with permission of the individual to whom it relates or where the Act allows.

Applicants, or RAOs on applicants’ behalf, must not directly contact GRP members or External Assessors in relation to their application, or the peer review process. If they do so, GRP members or External Assessors must inform NHMRC, and NHMRC may exclude the corresponding application(s) from further consideration. If a GRP member is also an applicant, they must not attempt to discuss any application(s) they have submitted or participated in, with the GRP secretariat. All applicants are to direct any queries to their Administering Institution’s RAO in the first instance. The office may consult NHMRC for further advice, where appropriate. Similarly, GRP members must not contact applicants.


5. PEER REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

There are four key types of participant involved in NHMRC peer review: NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff, the NHMRC Assigners Academy, External Assessors, and Grant Review Panellists (including the Chairs and Assistant Chairs).

5.1 NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff

NHMRC staff with extensive research expertise will be involved in:

- establishing the peer review panels;
- allocating applications to panels and spokespersons; and
- assisting and advising on the GRP process.

The NHMRC Assigners Academy may also assist with these functions.
5.2 NHMRC Assigners Academy

The NHMRC Assigners Academy consists of individuals with extensive knowledge of relevant Australian and international health and medical research fields and that have a reputation for integrity. Members of the Assigners Academy are individuals who have a broad involvement in the research community and have well-established networks within their particular disciplines. In 2013, the NHMRC Assigners Academy will support the peer review process by:

- identifying and obtaining up to two External Assessors for each of the approximately 25 - 35 applications they are allocated. In undertaking this task Assigners Academy members may consult other experts in the field including international experts. The decision on which assessor/s to nominate rests with the Assigners Academy member; and
- providing advice to NHMRC on panel membership and assignment of applications to GRPs.

Indigenous health research applications

Members of the Assigners Academy with Indigenous health expertise will be responsible for determining whether self-identified Indigenous health applications relate to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health and, therefore, whether it will be assessed as an Indigenous health research application by the Indigenous Grant Review Panel (IGRP). They will not be responsible for securing External Assessors. Discipline based Assigners Academy members will be responsible for securing up to two External Assessors with expertise relevant to the application’s scientific area for Indigenous health applications.

5.3 External Assessors

NHMRC endeavours to obtain two written assessments from External Assessors in addition to those prepared by the Primary Spokesperson for each application. An External Assessor:

- is selected by an Assigners Academy member;
- is considered to be an independent reviewer for the application;
- can be a national or international researcher;
- is chosen on the basis of their expertise in their field of research;
- must declare Conflict(s) of Interest (CoI) they may have with any aspect of the application prior to undertaking the assessment (see Attachment B).
  (Assigners Academy members and/or NHMRC staff will review the declarations and indicate whether the assessment can still occur);
- will provide a category score (using the seven-point scale – see Attachment C) against each of the three assessment criteria;
- will provide written assessments, including appropriate queries of applicants against each of the three assessment criteria which will then be made available to applicants for response; and
- has their report considered by the GRP, with the Secondary Spokesperson directly responsible for presenting the report.

The identity of the external assessors is not revealed to the applicant.

External Assessors who participate in the peer review process of the 2013 Project Grants scheme will be publicly acknowledged on NHMRC’s Honour Roll. The Honour Roll acknowledges Peer Reviewers and External Assessors across all NHMRC schemes, and is made available on the NHMRC website without reference to the application(s) or scheme(s) assessed.
5.4 Grant Review Panels

GRPs are established to review all Project Grant applications. Each GRP will consist of approximately 12 panel members. However, this may vary depending on the number of applications assigned to each panel. In 2013, NHMRC aims to reappoint approximately 60 per cent of panel members from the 2012 GRPs.

GRP members are appointed based on advice from NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff and the Assigners Academy. They 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 generally not reappointed for more than three consecutive years.

Panel members are chosen for their expertise and experience. The guiding principles for GRP establishment endorsed by Research Committee (see Attachment D) are applied when determining each panel’s membership. Geographical spread, gender balance and institutional representation are also considered when determining each panel’s membership. NHMRC endeavours to minimise instances where CIs are invited to participate on a GRP that will review their application.

The number of GRPs formed depends on the total number and type of applications received. Each panel is supported by a dedicated NHMRC secretariat, who will interact with each member as necessary.

In the event of a GRP member withdrawing from the peer review process NHMRC will, if time permits, replace them with another member possessing appropriate expertise relevant to the GRP. If a replacement member cannot be found, NHMRC will reallocate the applications ensuring that the expertise required for each application is appropriately represented.

Each GRP will be headed by a Chair with support from an Assistant Chair. Both will be impartial and will not participate in the assessment or scoring of applications.

NHMRC will attempt to minimize instances where a GRP Chair or Assistant Chair are Chief Investigator (CI) on an application being reviewed by the panel they are chairing. NHMRC endeavours to limit occurrences where applications are reviewed by a GRP where the Chief Investigator A (CIA) is a panel member.

The identity of GRP members is not revealed to the applicant.

GRP members who participate in the peer review process of the 2013 Project Grants scheme will be publicly acknowledged on NHMRC’s Honour Roll. The Honour Roll acknowledges Peer Reviewers and External Assessors across all NHMRC schemes, and is made available on the NHMRC website without reference to the application(s) or scheme(s) assessed.

5.5 GRP duties and responsibilities

The GRP roles and responsibilities are detailed in the following table. These duties are also outlined in the NHMRC GRP Induction video available on the NHMRC website at: [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/peer-review/nhmrc-grant-review-panels-induction](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/peer-review/nhmrc-grant-review-panels-induction).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>The Chair’s role is to ensure NHMRC’s procedures are adhered to and that a fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being reviewed at the GRP meeting. 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. Chairs will:</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Prior to the GRP meeting:

- identify and advise NHMRC of all real or potential CoI they have with applications to be reviewed by their GRP;
- familiarise themselves with all of the applications being considered by the GRP; and
- familiarise themselves with the ‘GRP Support Package’.

During panel meetings:

- chair the meeting, including:
  - ask members to declare any associations between panel members (e.g. current and previous collaborations) so that other panel members are aware of these associations;
  - keep discussions on time and focused;
  - ensure procedures are followed;
  - assist members with their duties and understanding what is expected of them;
  - take appropriate action for each declared CoI;
  - ensure that GRP members are given the opportunity to ‘rescue’ applications on the Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list before completing the NFFC process;
  - promote good engagement by Spokespersons and GRP members in all discussions;
  - ensure that all members consider “career disruption” and “relative to opportunity” when discussing track record of the team;
  - ensure applications deemed as a non-competitive application (NCA) by the GRP during the meeting, do not proceed to full discussion (refer to Step 1(page 18-19) for more information on NCA);
  - ensure the discussion leads to an outcome where the application is scored against the Category Descriptors appropriately (using the seven-point scale – see Attachment C);
  - ensure GRP members are satisfied with score outcomes and appropriately manage any uncertainty;
  - ensure that GRP members declare reasons for voting two or more away from the Primary Spokesperson’s score in any of the three assessment categories;
  - assist the panel to resolve budget discussions;
  - provide GRP members with an opportunity to identify any applications that should be revisited at the end of each day to ensure equity between applications;
- record key points provided by the Primary Spokesperson regarding an application’s strengths and weaknesses and other issues pertinent to each application during the panel discussion;
- lead the GRP’s discussion of budgets for Category 5 and above only except where required for Category 4 (i.e. New Investigator, Special Initiatives or those in the Priority Area of Indigenous health);
- record reasons for adjusting proposed budgets;
- where the panel recommends reductions of 20 per cent or more to proposed budgets, record a comprehensive rationale for such changes;
- ensure that budget considerations are consistent for all applications and provide GRP members an opportunity to identify applications that may need additional discussion at the end of each day;
- ensure all GRP members have an opportunity to provide comment on the final ranking of applications;
- ensure all information recorded is consistent with that of the Assistant Chair and NHMRC secretariat;
- ensure applications to be considered for the Marshall and Warren Award meet the aims of the award;
- endorse the review and scoring of applications by the GRP, which is reflected in the GRP Assessment Summary; and
- record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice.

Chairs will be required to attend a Chair’s meeting on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings to discuss the progress of each GRP and any problems that may have arisen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Chairs</th>
<th>GRP members will:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Chairs will:</td>
<td>identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they may have with applications to be reviewed by their panel;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>record key points provided by the Primary Spokesperson regarding an application’s strengths and weaknesses and other issues pertinent to each application during the panel discussion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>record reasons for adjusting the proposed budgets;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>where the panel recommends reductions of 20 per cent or more to proposed budgets, record a comprehensive rationale for such changes;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ensure all budget discussions are consistent for all applications and inform the Chair if inconsistencies arise; and</td>
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<td>prepare a report on the effectiveness with which the panel performed its duties.</td>
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Members

- identify and advise NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications on their GRP;
- provide a fair, impartial and scientific assessment within the prescribed timeframes;
- read all applications to be assessed by the GRP, including the Assessors Report1 and the Applicant Responses;
- confirm the inclusion of applications on the NFFC list or ‘rescue’ those that warrant discussion at the GRP;
- prepare for and participate in panel discussion for each application including budget discussions where applicable;

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1 The Assessors Report consists of the Spokesperson and External Assessor reports. Through reference to this document, applicants will have an opportunity to respond to the comments and questions raised by the Primary Spokesperson and External Assessors.
• score each application reviewed by the panel; and
• review discussions of applications daily to ensure equity between applications.
### Primary Spokesperson (1SP)

**Prior to the GRP meeting:**
- review the allocated applications against the assessment criteria;
- where applicable, confirm that applications on the IGRP are indeed relevant to Indigenous health research;
- score the applications and prepare a Spokesperson report (including questions) in RGMS within the prescribed timeframe to be addressed by the applicant;
- scrutinise the proposed budget to ensure that Personal Support Packages (PSPs), Direct Research Costs (DRCs) and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified;
- following consideration of the Assessors Report and Applicant Response, 1SP should rescore the application (if appropriate) and enter scores into RGMS within the prescribed timeframes; and
- prepare speaking notes for each application assigned to them as 1SP.

**At the GRP meeting:**
- provide initial scores for allocated applications or declare them to be NCA;
- lead the discussion using prepared notes;
- provide final scores for allocated applications;
- if required, assist the 2SP in discussion on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the requested budget.

### Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)

**Prior to the GRP meeting:**
- where applicable, confirm that applications on the IGRP are indeed relevant to Indigenous health research;
- score the applications against the assessment criteria (*but do not need to provide a written report*) and enter scores into RGMS within the prescribed timeframe;
- following consideration of the Assessors Report and Applicant Response, 2SP should rescore the application (if appropriate) and enter scores into RGMS within the prescribed timeframes;
- prepare speaking notes for each application assigned to them as 2SP;
- consider the Assessors Report when preparing speaking notes and providing scores;
- where an Applicant Response has alleged that an assessor is inappropriate or biased, ensure that this is raised with NHMRC staff, and if advised, considered by the GRP; and
- rigorously assess the proposed budgets and prepare a thorough evaluation of their appropriateness, including any reference made to the budget by the 1SP or EAs.

**At the GRP meeting:**
- provide initial scores for allocated applications or declare them to be NCA;
- add to 1SP comments with reference to prepared notes;
- ensure that External Assessor(s) comments and scores, specifically the strengths and concerns raised, are presented to the GRP; and
• ensure that the Applicant Responses are presented;
• provide final scores for allocated applications;
• be prepared to lead discussion on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the requested budget; and
• ensure that the individual elements of the budget; PSPs, DRCs and equipment, are appropriate for the project and fully justified.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>NHMRC secretariat</th>
<th>NHMRC secretariat assigned to each panel will:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• act as the first point of contact for GRP members;</td>
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<td>• approach potential GRP members, on advice from NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff and the Assigners Academy;</td>
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<td>• provide the following administrative support and advice to the Chair, Assistant Chair and members:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o facilitate use of RGMS;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o maintain accurate records of CoIs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o ensure that the Chair is aware of all CoIs declared by members;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o provide advice on the treatment of declared CoIs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• facilitate access to Assessors Report to the applicant via RGMS;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• prepare the list of <em>Not For Further Consideration</em> applications;</td>
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<td>• ensure the declared CoI of the Assistant Chair and Panel members is signed off by the Chair and the declared CoI of the Chair is signed off by the CEO or delegate;</td>
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<td>• prepare the order in which applications will be reviewed during the GRP meeting;</td>
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<td>• advise the Chair and Assistant Chair of instances where the panel recommends reductions of 20 per cent or more to the proposed budget;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• record outcomes of GRP recommendations; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• record and notify NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff of any requests for clarification or advice.</td>
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5.6 GRP Observers

Observers will be briefed on GRP procedures prior to the GRP meeting. They will not participate in the discussion of any application, and will be identified by their name tags.

During GRP discussions independent Observers will:
  • monitor the procedural aspects of the GRPs; and
  • provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across all GRPs.

Observers are subject to the same CoI requirements as the GRP panellists. The Chairs must make sure that Observers are fully aware of the names and affiliations of the Chief Investigators of applications under discussion.

Observers may raise issues of a general nature with NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff who may communicate these issues to Chairs at the *Chair’s Meetings* on Monday - Wednesday afternoons.

Further queries about Observers should be directed to NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff.
6. THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

The NHMRC peer review process is expected to provide a rigorous, fair, transparent and consistent assessment of the merits of each application in keeping with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (available at: [www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm)).

6.1 Assignment of applications to GRPs

Applications receive a preliminary assignment to a GRP based on the Peer Review Areas and Fields of Research (FoRs) chosen by applicants within RGMS to best describe their research proposal. Particular considerations apply to the assignment of applications to the Indigenous Grant Review Panel (IGRP) as detailed in the Funding Rules.

Subsequent to the preliminary assignment, NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff confirm the allocation of all applications to an appropriate GRP. The Assigners Academy is consulted to confirm the application is assigned to the most appropriate GRP.

6.2 Before the GRP Meeting

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Step A. Obtaining External Assessments</th>
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<tr>
<td>The NHMRC Assigners Academy, in consultation with NHMRC, will identify and obtain up to two External Assessors for each application. Assigners Academy members may choose to consult other appropriate experts for advice on suitable assessors. However, it is the Assigners Academy member’s role to identify and obtain suitable External Assessors for each application. The Assigners Academy will be provided with information for the purposes of declaring CoIs in accordance with the guidelines provided in Attachment B. Assigners Academy members will not nominate assessors for applications where they have a CoI. Nominated non-assessors are automatically declared to be highly conflicted with the application by NHMRC and will not be approached by Assigners Academy members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assigners Academy members may informally contact External Assessors regarding assessment prior to External Assessors being contacted through a formal email. External Assessors will be asked to notify their availability and to identify CoIs, prior to gaining access to the full application in RGMS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where a potential External Assessor declares a high CoI they will not be granted access to the full application and will not be required to provide a report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If the nominated External Assessor has declared no conflicts, they will be provided access to the full application to make comments against the three assessment criteria and provide a score against each criterion using the category scores (<a href="#">Attachment C</a>) via RGMS. They may also remark on the proposed budget and include additional comments and questions to ask the applicant. The comments by the External Assessors form part of the Assessors Report.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Step B. Identification of GRP members’ Conflicts of Interest</th>
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<tr>
<td>As panel members are invited to participate on a panel, they will be provided access (via RGMS) to the Snapshot Summary Report of each application assigned to the GRP, and will declare their CoI in accordance with the guidelines provided in Attachment B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members will be given access to the full application only if they have no or a low CoI. Where panel members declare that they have a high CoI they will not be granted access to the full application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some members may have a CoI for which they require a ruling. In this instance NHMRC staff</td>
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will assess the information in the declaration and specify a particular level of participation in RGMS. Members are requested to ensure they include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate CoI assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. Important details include:

- In the case of collaborations and relationships (e.g. publications, grants, etc.), did these activities occur five or more years ago, or are they more recent?
- What is/was the extent of the collaborations (e.g. frequent direct interaction or only familiarity with an individual through a common institution)?
- Is the collaboration (e.g. through publications, grants, etc.), with a Chief Investigator, or an Associate Investigator?

The answers to these questions will help NHMRC staff to assess the CoI. NHMRC’s peer review processes are more rigorous if experts are not unnecessarily excluded from the assessment process due to ambiguity arising from excessively brief CoI declarations.

Similarly, the peer review process is hindered by high CoI declarations that have not been provided ahead of the GRPs meetings. Panel members are urged to confirm that they concur with NHMRC’s ruling of their CoI in advance of the panels meeting.

### Step C. Allocation of Spokespersons

Upon completion of their CoI declarations, panel members will have an opportunity to identify applications for which they are best placed to review as the Primary or Secondary Spokesperson. Taking into account CoIs and Spokesperson’s expertise, final allocation of Primary and Secondary Spokespersons will be determined by NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff, with guidance from the Assigners Academy, where necessary.

### Step D. GRP members access applications

All panel members will be provided with RGMS access to those applications on their panel, excluding any applications where a high CoI exists. When accessing the full application, panel members should again check whether they have a CoI not previously evident.

GRP members who become aware of any previously undeclared CoI should contact the NHMRC secretariat to determine the significance of the CoI. The panel member may be required to delete the files pertaining to applications with which they are conflicted.

### Step E. Preparation of Spokesperson reports

The 1SP prepares a Spokesperson report that will be provided to the applicant in the Assessors Report. The Spokesperson report should include questions on those aspects of the application that require clarification including the appropriateness of the requested budget. The 1SP should consult the 2SP for specific questions regarding appropriateness of the requested budget to be included in the Assessor Report. The 1SP will not be in possession of the External Assessor report when preparing this report to facilitate preparation of an impartial assessment. At this point, the 1SP will also provide initial criterion scores against each of the three assessment criteria.

When determining questions for the applicant, the 1SP should:

- be clear and concise so as to not mislead the applicant;
- not provide an opportunity for the applicant to modify the research plan in any major way;
- not provide arbitrary or irrelevant commentary of the application;
- not identify the 1SP and 2SP, or which GRP will review the application; and
• not prioritise questions to the applicant, except to identify whether the issue is of major or minor significance (i.e. refrain from numbering questions).

Questions may seek to:

• ask additional scientific questions that may assist the GRP to understand the application;
• gain further justification of any perceived weaknesses in the project
• clarify budget issues, including appropriateness of PSPs, DRCs and equipment (where applicable) requested, relationships with other applications, funding sources and existing grants held by the applicants. If the 1SP or 2SP feels the budget is overstated, it is essential that the applicant is given a chance to defend their proposal; and
• give the applicant the opportunity to explain any identified issues or problems with their track record, or where relevant, the composition of the proposed research team.

Assessment of Track Record (Team Quality and Capability)

All assessments of Track Record should be reviewed relative to opportunity and where relevant should take into consideration any career disruptions. Further details of track record assessment are outlined below.

Track Record (Team Quality and Capability)

The quality and capability of the team (all CI(s) and other key personnel listed on the application), relative to opportunity, should be assessed when considering track record. Aspects of track record to consider include:

a) the record of achievement of the team, including translation of research findings into practice, where applicable;

b) appropriateness of the teams expertise to undertake the proposed research; and

c) the national and/or international reputation of the team in their field/s relative to opportunity.

Peer reviewers’ consideration of relative to opportunity may take into account the amount of time spent as an active researcher; career disruption; available resources; clinical, administrative or teaching workload; relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting; restrictions on publication associated with time spent working in other sectors (e.g., industry, policy and government) and the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question.

A number of the assessment criteria for NHMRC funding schemes are assessed relative to opportunity. This reflects NHMRC’s aim that assessment processes accurately measure an applicant’s track record relative to stage of career, including consideration as to whether productivity and contribution is commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant.

Career Disruption

Career disruption represents a separate category within the assessment of relative to opportunity, and includes pregnancy; major illness; and carer responsibilities including parental leave. Employment outside the research sector including time spent working in industry; clinical, administrative or teaching workload; relocation of laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact upon research productivity are not considered to be career disruption and are considered under relative to opportunity.
Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers should take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field when assessing the publication component of an applicant’s track record. Track record assessment should take into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of all of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published. NHMRC encourages the publication of articles in high-impact journals, but warns against using the overall impact of all publications in a journal as a proxy measure for the impact of individual published outputs. It is not appropriate to use publication and citation metrics such as Journal Impact Factors, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List or h-index when assessing applications as these can potentially be misleading when applied to the peer review of publication outputs of individuals, and may also not be relevant to the project under consideration. More information on this topic can be found at:


or


Step F. Finalisation of Assessor Reports

Both the Spokesperson and External Assessor reports will be made available to applicants through the Assessors Report, which will be accessible through RGMS in accordance with the Applicant Response period advertised on the Project Grants webpage (http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/apply-funding/project-grants). NHMRC will not preview the assessors’ comments. Assessors must ensure, therefore, that their reports do not contain inappropriate or defamatory remarks.

Examples of language that is inappropriate and may be defamatory include:

- “like all researchers at University X, the Chief Investigator (X) has a poor track record……” [note: other researchers of the University are irrelevant to the application]
- “the applicant is strongly supported by his spouse” [note: the assessor should refer only to professional relationships i.e. the applicant is strongly supported by Professor X, who is the Chief Investigator (Y)]
- “writing could be improved and thus less irritating for the reader” [note: comment not relevant to assessment criteria]
- “the NHMRC must fund more projects which offer Australian researchers more opportunities in……” [note: comment not relevant to assessment criteria]
- “The applicant/institution already receives too much funding” [note: comment not relevant to assessment criteria]
- “The idea that this research could determine……is clearly ludicrous” [note: better to use language that is reasonable, and not likely to offend]

If assessors believe that the proposed research has already been done by others, they may raise this in their assessment. Assessors should provide references so that applicants have the opportunity to comments in their applicant response.

NHMRC is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (the FOI Act) and is committed to meeting the Australian Government’s transparency and accountability requirements. Changes to the FOI legislation as of late 2010 have implications for the way in which NHMRC responds to and reports on, requests for information under the FOI Act. The FOI Act provides a legal right of access to any person to obtain documents of Commonwealth agencies. Access to documents
may only be refused where the FOI Act provides a legal basis for the refusal, such as where the documents are exempt.

However, subject to its FOI obligations, NHMRC remains committed to maintaining the confidentiality of grant applications, the peer review process and the privacy of people participating in peer review. If an FOI application is received in relation to peer review documents, NHMRC will take into account the nature of those documents and where appropriate, consult with anyone whose personal information or business information may be affected by the release of those documents.

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**Step G. Applicants respond to Assessors Report**

Applicants are given the opportunity to submit a written response to the Assessors Report. The response should address the questions raised and is not an opportunity to modify the proposed research plan except where the application is a Clinical Trial proposal. The Applicant Response period will be open from late May and conclude in mid-June. Applicants will be advised of the precise date for completing application responses, and will be allowed up to 10 days, inclusive of weekends, in which to submit their Applicant Response. These timeframes are dependent upon the timely provision and availability of reports from the Primary Spokesperson and External Assessors.

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**Step H. GRP members access all assessment documentation**

Panel members will have access to all assessment documentation (taking into consideration CoIs) including the Assessors Report, and the Applicant Response for each application through RGMS.

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**Step I. Spokespersons rescore applications**

Once the Applicant Responses have been received, the Spokespersons for each application will consider the research proposal in conjunction with the Assessors Report and Applicant Response. Where appropriate, the Spokesperson may rescore applications in RGMS against the assessment criteria and Category Descriptors.

The Spokespersons’ scores will facilitate the identification of those applications assessed to be the least competitive third of applications being considered by each GRP, and which may be included in the NFFC list. Further details are below in Section 6.6.

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### 6.3 Indigenous Health Research Grant Review Panel (IGRP)

Where an applicant identifies in their application (*Part A-A2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*, and/or *Part A-RC: Research Classification*, and/or *Part B-PSI: Priority/Special Initiative*) that at least 20 per cent of their research effort and/or capacity building relates specifically to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health, the application will be assigned to the IGRP on a preliminary basis. Assignment of applications to the IGRP will be managed by the NHMRC Assigners Academy members with Indigenous health expertise, in consultation with NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff, prior to finalisation. The Primary and Secondary Spokespersons for applications on the IGRP will also have the opportunity to confirm whether their applications are relevant to Indigenous health research.

The peer review of applications assigned to the IGRP is further outlined in Attachment E.

NHMRC will endeavour to ensure Indigenous researchers constitute at least 50 per cent of the IGRP’s membership. Advice on IGRP panel membership will be sought from the Assigners Academy and the relevant Indigenous Committee.

Consistent with all GRPs, the IGRP will assess applications against the three assessment criteria
The IGRP may be supported by additional independent scientific advice to inform its assessment of applications.

The IGRP will also review the relative strength of each application in terms of how well it addresses NHMRC’s Criteria for Health and Medical Research of Indigenous Australians (the Indigenous Criteria) (see Attachment F). Applicants will be provided with an opportunity to respond to the assessment against the Indigenous Criteria in their Applicant Response.

The IGRP may place conditions on applications to ensure they meet the Indigenous Criteria if successfully funded.

6.4 Clinical Trials

Where an applicant identifies in their application (Part A: Ethics and/or Part A – A-RC: Research Classification) that the research proposal involves a clinical trial and where the scale and scope of the application is substantial, the application will be assigned on a preliminary basis to the Clinical Trial GRP (CT-GRP). Assignment of applications to the CT-GRP will be confirmed on advice from NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff and/or the Assigners Academy.

Distinct from standard Project Grants applications, Clinical Trial (CT) applications will be permitted to modify their research plan in response to the Assessors Report. Applicants are not permitted to add named researchers to the research team. However, applicants may indicate their intention to involve additional expertise. The CT-GRP may, where appropriate, recommend NHMRC fund a proportion of the proposed budget in the expectation that the applicant will secure the remaining funds from other sources. In any such situation NHMRC will provide the applicant with a response indicating whether the application would be funded if co-funding became available within the following 12 months. Evidence of financial commitment of co-funder(s) will be required prior to approval by the Minister for Health, for support of a co-funded CT.

6.5 Young Investigator application within the Cancer Australia’s Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme (PdCCRS)

Cancer Australia’s PdCCRS Young Investigator applications are permitted one additional page in their Detailed Background and Research Plan. The additional page must only include information to explain which parts of the proposal should be considered for funding from NHMRC and/or PdCCRS. For further information please refer to Page 20 of the Advice and Instructions document, available at:


6.6 Selection of the ‘Marshall and Warren Award’

Dr Robin Warren AC and Professor Barry Marshall AC FAA FRS were awarded the Nobel Prize in 2005 for their discovery of the bacterium Helicobacter pylori and its role in gastritis and peptic ulcer disease. This has reduced suffering, and saved the health system significant expense in surgery, hospitalisation, and chronic drug treatment. Each year NHMRC will designate at least one highly innovative, potentially transformative, Project Grant for the Marshall and Warren Award(s).

Applications nominated for this award will be highly innovative but overall may not be as competitive as other applications when, for example, Track Record or Scientific Quality is considered.

Process for nominations:
• Highly innovative and potentially transformative applications that are assessed as being fundable and that may or may not fall below the funding cut-off will be considered for the Award.
• Each GRP will be asked to nominate one application considered by the GRP to be highly significant or innovative and to provide a 2-4 sentence justification for the nomination.
• In the event that on a given panel several applications are considered worthy of a nomination, the Chair will consult all non-conflicted panel members to determine which of the applications is ultimately nominated for the award.
• It is anticipated that Research Committee will recommend funding for one award, but may recommend more.

6.7 At the GRP Meeting

Each GRP will meet for up to five days (depending on the number of applications to be reviewed) to review each application allocated to the panel that is not on the Not For Further Consideration list.

GRP meetings will commence on a Monday morning with an induction session for all members. The induction session will provide an opportunity for members to ask questions and clarify any matters relating to the peer review process. Attendance is compulsory.

Review of applications commences on Monday morning and will be conducted as follows:

Declaration of inter-relationships (Suggested time limit – 30 minutes)

When members meet face-to-face for the first time, each panel member will be invited to briefly describe their expertise and previous experience sitting on any review panels or specifically on NHMRC GRPs. During their introductions, members will be asked to declare any relationships with other panel members including:

• current collaborations and previous collaborations;
• former student/teacher/mentoring relationships;
• common employment/institutional relationships; and
• other relationships that may, or be seen to, impair fair and impartial judgement.

This information is sought for the benefit of panel members, who may raise any concerns arising from declarations with NHMRC staff.

Confirmation of Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) applications and applications proceeding to full discussion (Suggested time limit – 15 minutes)

Prior to the GRPs meeting, panel members will be provided with a list of applications (adjusted for CoIs) to be considered by their panel. Identified in this list will be applications that have been assessed to be among the least competitive third of applications assigned to the panel, excluding those that have been ranked as a notional category five, based on scores provided by Spokespersons. Where scores are not provided, applications will not be captured in this list. This list comprises NFFC applications.

Members will have reviewed the NFFC list before the GRP meeting to determine those application(s) they may wish to ‘rescue’. At the meeting, each member will be provided with a revised NFFC list (adjusted for CoI). Each member will be invited to confirm, in writing that application(s) on their revised NFFC list will not require further consideration by the panel.

The NHMRC secretariat will collect the signed NFFC list from each member at the commencement of the GRP. Subject to any ‘rescues’, those applications remaining on the NFFC list will be removed from the GRP’s list for detailed discussion.
If a CoI is declared by the Primary or Secondary Spokesperson for applications that appear on their NFFC list, a new Primary or Secondary Spokesperson will be assigned to the application, and it will be placed in the running list to be reviewed in detail by the panel. The scores from the initial Spokesperson will be discarded.

Note: an application may only be included on the NFFC list if NHMRC has received a score by the Primary and Secondary Spokesperson.

It is important to note that applications on the NFFC list are subject to CoI considerations, as are all applications, and therefore should not be discussed between members.

For all applications proceeding to full discussion, the following steps are taken:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1.</th>
<th>Chair to announce the application (Suggested time limit – 2 minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.</td>
<td>The Chair will announce the application to be discussed including the title, institution, Chief Investigators, Associate Investigators, and whether the application has applied for New Investigator or Special Initiative funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.</td>
<td>The Chair will identify any members that have previously identified a CoI with the application. Those members should leave the room if they have a declared CoI that prevents them from participating in the assessment of the application under discussion. The Chair will also invite members to identify if they have since identified a conflict with the application. If a member declares a new CoI, or wishes to discuss any concerns related to an existing CoI, the matter will be recorded and discussed with the NHMRC secretariat. Where appropriate, the concerns may be relayed to NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff for advice. This decision making can take extra time so it is important that all CoI are declared and decided upon well in advance of the meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a CoI is declared at the GRP meeting by a Primary or Secondary Spokesperson, which prevents them from participating in the assessment of the application, a new Primary or Secondary Spokesperson will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial Spokesperson will be discarded.

1.3. The Chair will then announce the name of the Spokespersons and the External Assessors. Where an application is scored poorly, the Chair may check with the Spokespersons and GRP members to determine whether the application is a non-competitive application (NCA) in the current funding round. While the number of NCA applications has reduced since the introduction of the NFFC process, there may still be occasions where they occur, for example, there was not a full complement of scores (1SP and 2SP), or where someone has rescued an application from the NFFC list. Where the panel is in consensus, the application will be considered NCA and the panel will not proceed with a full discussion. A ballot is not necessary to declare an application NCA. New Investigators and Special Initiative applications can be deemed as an NCA if considered non-competitive by the GRP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2.</th>
<th>The 1SP to comment on the application -(Suggested time limit – 6 minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.</td>
<td>share their three criteria scores (using the seven-point scale - see Attachment C) with the panel. (The 2SP may also share their score at this time);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.</td>
<td>comment on the application’s strengths and weaknesses against the relevant criteria, providing a concise summary of the proposed project. The 1SP will assume that GRP members are familiar with documentation relating to the application;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. ensure that relevant considerations (e.g. Track Record relevant to opportunity, Career Disruptions) are taken into account; and

2.4. not make reference to the budget.

Step 3. The 2SP to comment on the application – *(Suggested time limit – 4 minutes)*

The 2SP will:

3.1. Add to 1SP comments with reference to prepared notes;

3.2. present the External Assessors’ views, and the adequacy of the applicant’s response;

3.3. briefly highlight their agreement/disagreement with the 1SP and External Assessors’ comments; and

3.4. not discuss the budget relating to the application.

Step 4. Full panel discussion – *(Suggested time limit – 5-10 minutes)*

All members discuss the application. GRP members have an opportunity to ask questions of both Spokespersons and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are taken into account.

*Note:* Spokespersons are permitted to change their scores for the assessment criteria after the full panel discussion, but must declare this to the GRP. Following the panel’s discussion, the Chair will confirm the Spokespersons’ three criteria scores before the panel votes on an application.

The Chair should ensure adequate review of the application occurs and that all members get a fair opportunity to comment.

Step 5. Scoring by members – *(Suggested time limit – 2 minutes)*

Following the full panel discussion, all GRP members, excluding the Chair, Assistant Chair and those who are absent because of CoI, are to score the application in a secret ballot. All scoring GRP members will record their score on the seven-point scale for each of the three assessment criteria. If a GRP member intends to score two or more scores away from any of the Primary Spokesperson’s three scores, the GRP member must declare this to the GRP and provide a brief justification, which will be recorded by the NHMRC secretariat. Members’ scores will be managed by NHMRC’s secretariat. At the completion of scoring, the NHMRC secretariat will announce the following results to the GRP:

1. **Rating** - The rating will be determined by including each voting member’s score for each of the assessment criteria. The rating, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion; and

2. **Category** - this will be deemed, based on the calculated rating, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating range</th>
<th>Deemed Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.001 - 1.500</td>
<td>deemed as Category 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.501 - 2.500</td>
<td>deemed as Category 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.501 - 3.500 deemed as Category 3
3.501 - 4.500 deemed as Category 4
4.501 - 5.500 deemed as Category 5
5.501 - 6.500 deemed as Category 6
6.501 - 7.000 deemed as Category 7

The Chair, Assistant Chair and NHMRC secretariat will document these scores. Where members are uncertain or have concerns regarding the final score, the chair should invite further discussion. If any member disagrees with the outcome, the Chair may invite further discussion to satisfy members of the calculated score. If any member still disagrees with the outcome, members will be invited to re-score for that application.

A quorum must be present for scoring to occur. For the purposes of GRP meetings a quorum is one member more than half the total number of members. NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to GRP meetings, those applications that do not have a quorum and obtain a suitably qualified member from a panel meeting in the same week to participate in panel discussion and scoring on that application. In cases where a quorum issue only becomes evident at the GRP meeting NHMRC Senior Scientific Staff may seconde an appropriately qualified member from another panel for the assessment of the application who will participate in the discussion and score the application.

**Step 6. Discussion of proposed budget – (Suggested time limit – 5-10 minutes)**

Applications with a category score of five and above will trigger a discussion of the proposed budget. The GRP will consider the elements of the budget, including justification and provide advice on an appropriate budget for the application (see Attachment G for budget guidelines).

Applications in the following areas with a category score of 4 and above should also include a discussion on the proposed budget:

- New Investigator
- Indigenous health
- Hearing Loss Prevention
- Electromagnetic Fields

With reference to their notes, the 2SP will discuss the proposed budget and comment on the appropriateness of the outlined costs. Other panel members may also provide relevant assessment. Where the GRP deems that the proposed budget is in excess of that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended.

The Chair will lead the budget discussion to ensure equity is achieved between applications. The Chair, Assistant Chair, and NHMRC secretariat will then record budget recommendations as agreed to by the panel. The rationale for differences between the recommended and requested budget will be annotated. Comparatively detailed records of budget discussions will be maintained where reductions of 20 per cent or more are recommended. The Chair will sign and verify that the budget recommendations have been recorded correctly.

NHMRC reserves the right to amend the budget recommended by the GRP for any application.
Step 7. Reconciliation and further review of applications

At the end of each day’s deliberations, a reconciliation of applications reviewed, will take place. This process gives GRP members an opportunity to raise any concerns regarding applications that have been reviewed throughout the day or earlier in the week.

Where a GRP member believes an application may have been reviewed in an inconsistent manner, they should raise the matter with the GRP Chair. NHMRC secretariat will ensure that CoIs are addressed prior to details of the application and the circumstances of concern being outlined to the panel.

In the event that an application needs to be reassessed, the application will be reopened for discussion and rescored by the panel at the next opportunity (i.e. the following day).

The Chair may also revisit budget discussions at the end of each day to ensure consistency was achieved.

Step 8. Confirmation of the Order of Merit.

At the end of the week (following review of the GRP’s last application), the GRP will be provided with a ranked list of category 5 applications (and, where needed, category 4 applications) based on the calculated rating (see Step 5).

Depending on the ranking of applications, the GRP may undertake “Final Ranking” (see Attachment H) to adjust the preliminary Order of Merit. All proposed movements will need to be justified and have consensus from the panel. At this time panel members will also confirm that the applications for which they are 1SP have had their Category and Ratings correctly entered into NHMRC’s database.


Where more than one nomination occurs within a panel, the GRP Chair and NHMRC Secretariat will request the panel to recommend only one application for the award at the end of the peer review week.

Following consensus of the nominated Marshall & Warren Award application, the Chair is to check whether the application is below category five. If it is below category five, the panel must determine a budget.

All those with a conflict of interest for this application will be asked to leave the room and the Chair will lead the budget discussion (see Step 6).

Step 10. Preparation of GRP Assessment Summary

All applicants will receive a GRP Assessment Summary. These reports are finalised after panel discussion of the application and scores have been entered into RGMS. An example template of the report as it appears in RGMS is at Attachment I.

Where the application was discussed in full by the GRP, the GRP Assessment Summary will indicate:

1. Scores against the Category Descriptors:
   a. Scientific Quality;
   b. Significance and/or Innovation;
   c. Track Record – relative to opportunity; and
   d. Overall category

2. The quartile within the overall category into which the application fell.
For applications deemed NCA or NFFC, an example template of the GRP Assessment Summary as it appears in RGMS is at Attachment J.

6.8 After the GRP Meeting

NHMRC takes the following actions immediately after the GRP meetings conclude:

1) **Linearisation of scores** – Linearisation of scores is undertaken to ensure that NHMRC funds the same proportion of category five applications from each GRP, which minimises any potential panel-specific bias.

   The linearised score will be used in determining the ultimate funding cut-off and to prepare a consolidated final list from which funding recommendations to Research Committee will be developed.

2) **Funding recommendations** - NHMRC will review the linearised list of applications and determine which applications, including those addressing a nominated Priority Area, or Special Initiative will be recommended for funding. Research Committee recommends those applications to be funded through Council to the CEO who submits them for approval to the Minister for Health.

3) **Funding announcements** – Subsequent to Ministerial approval, applicants are advised of the outcome of their application through their Administering Institution.

4) **External agencies** - Applications that are also being considered for funding external to the NHMRC (see Part 2, Section 5 of the Funding Rules) will be forwarded to the relevant organisation(s) for their consideration.

5) **Special Initiatives** - Applications falling into the fundable categories and seeking funding as a nominated Special Initiative will be considered by NHMRC’s Research Committee according to an established process.

6) **GRP Survey** – GRP members are required to participate in a short online survey after their GRP meeting week. The survey is anonymous and responses will assist in shaping future peer review processes.

**Retention of GRP Documentation**

GRP members are to retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until February 2014. Any additional confidential documentation associated with the application process can be disposed of at the GRP meeting.

**Disposal of classified waste**

Facilities for the disposal of classified waste will be available at the GRP meetings.
ATTACHMENT A: Overview of 2013 Peer Review Process

N.B. The review of applications assigned to the IGRP is further outlined in Attachment E.

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**NHMRC**

Applications close
19 March 2013
NHMRC checks eligibility issues & identifies Priority Areas, Special Initiatives, clinical trials and IGRP applications

**EXTERNAL TO GRP & NHMRC**

Applicants prepare response & submit to NHMRC via RGMS

**NHMRC**

NHMRC provides GRP with access to the Assessors Reports & Applicant Responses (taking account of CoIs)

**EXTERNAL TO GRP & NHMRC**

External agencies consider applications assessed as fundable but not recommended for NHMRC funding

---

**NHMRC**

- Linearises scores, to ensure the same proportion of category five applications from each GRP are funded and prepares a consolidated ranked list
- Determines which priority area applications will be recommended for funding
- Prepares funding recommendations for Research Committee

**Mid- Late September 2013**

Research Committee
- Consider funding recommendations & advise CEO
- Review rules and recommend changes for the following year

CEO submits funding recommendations to Minister (through Council)

**Minister**

considers funding recommendations and instructs CEO

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**NHMRC**

After GRP meeting
Members complete survey

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**Peer Review Guidelines**

3 April 2013
ATTACHMENT B: Guideline for Managing Conflicts of Interest in NHMRC Peer Review

Definition
The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) defines a Conflict of Interest (CoI) as arising ‘…in any situation where personal, financial or other interest has the potential to compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, professional judgement and the ability to make unbiased decisions…’.

Introduction
(Source: Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, S7)

A CoI exists where there is a divergence between the individual interests of a person and their professional responsibilities such that an independent observer might reasonably conclude that the professional actions of that person are unduly influenced by their own interests.

CoIs in the research area are common and it is important that they are disclosed and dealt with properly. CoIs have the potential to compromise judgments and decisions that should be made impartially. Such compromise could undermine community trust in research.

Financial CoIs are foremost in the public mind but other CoIs also occur in research, including personal, professional and institutional advantages.

The perception that a CoI exists is also a serious matter and raises concerns about the integrity of individuals or the management practices of the institution.

Researchers frequently have a conflict of interest 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 decision. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, and be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

Responsibilities of Peer Review Participants

For NHMRC peer review purposes, CoIs may fall into the broad domains of:

- involvement with the application under review
- collaborations
- working relationships
- professional relationships and interests
- social relationships or interests
- teaching or supervisory relationships
- financial relationships or interests
- other interests or relationships

The following Conflict of Interest Situations table outlines matters that may need to be considered when deciding where potential conflicts lie and provides some examples of specific situations where a CoI in the peer review process applies.

The table is intended to be for guidance only. It is representative of CoI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits.

The table is provided to assist participants in the Peer Review process to identify the types of circumstances in which a CoI might arise, but is not intended to be a checklist.
If you are invited to participate in a peer review process, you will be asked to declare any actual or perceived CoI you have. If you are unsure whether the nature of the situation constitutes a CoI with an application you have been asked to review, you should provide sufficient detail about the nature of the (perceived) conflict to enable NHMRC to promptly assess each case.

Your CoI declaration will enable NHMRC to determine:

(i) whether or not, after the conflict has been declared, you should be involved in the peer review process in relation to a particular application; and

(ii) if you are to be involved, the scope of such involvement (e.g. provide a score or report but not be involved in further discussion or the final scoring/ranking of an application).

Failure to Declare Conflicts of Interest

The National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992 (NHMRC Act) requires CoIs to be identified and specifies the courses of action that apply when this requirement has not been met:

- Section 42A of the NHMRC Act requires members to disclose interests in matters being considered.
- Section 44B(3) requires the Minister or the CEO to terminate the appointment of a member for failing to comply with the requirements of the NHMRC Act.

It is therefore important for participants to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which either constitutes, may constitute, or could be seen to constitute a CoI.
CONFLICT OF INTEREST - SITUATIONS

Please Note: If you are uncertain about whether you have a CoI, please contact NHMRC secretariat immediately to seek their advice and guidance about your individual CoI issue.

In general the period to consider for these situations is whether they arose within the last five years. This would typically be the case for collaborative, working and professional situations, but you should also consider whether there is something that you know will be happening in the future that should be disclosed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Explanations and Examples</th>
<th>Indicative Ruling$^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contribution to the application under review</td>
<td>1.1. Are you a named participant on the application under review?</td>
<td>Yes = High Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2. Have you had discussions or input into the design study or research proposal for this application?</td>
<td>Yes = High Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Collaborations</td>
<td>2.1. Have you actively collaborated? • publications – co-authorship • pending applications • existing grants (both with the NHMRC, other organisations, or funding sources)</td>
<td>Yes = High Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2. Have you any indirect collaboration? • a co-worker who is collaborating with the applicant • member of a research/discussion group • published together as authors of a multiple-authorship paper where involvement was minimal • provided cells/animals to applicant(s) with/without financial gain/exchange</td>
<td>Yes = Requires a ruling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3. Are you planning (or have been approached) to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with the applicant(s)?</td>
<td>Yes = Requires a ruling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^2$ Rulings are indicative only. Experienced NHMRC staff will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict and, in doing so, will consider the particular circumstance of each potential conflict.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Explanations and Examples</th>
<th>Indicative Ruling²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Working relationship</td>
<td>3.1. Do you have the same employer/organisation?</td>
<td>Yes = Usually a high conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2. Are you working in the same department (or equivalent) within the organisation?</td>
<td>Yes = High Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3. Do you work in the same locality but for a different employer/organisation?</td>
<td>Yes = Requires a ruling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>Consider things such as: • membership of scientific advisory or review boards, exam boards, trial committees • whether you, or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant(s) organisation (and vice versa) • whether you or your organisation have an affiliation/association with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies, etc.</td>
<td>Yes = requires a ruling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social relationship and/or interests</td>
<td>Consider relationships such as: • personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant • you have a personal/social relationship with the applicant’s partner or other member of their family</td>
<td>Yes = Usually high conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teaching or supervisory relationship</td>
<td>For undergraduate or post-graduate studies: • you taught or supervised the applicant(s) • you co-supervised or taught with the applicant(s) • your own research was supervised by the applicants(s)</td>
<td>Yes = High Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations</td>
<td>Explanations and Examples</td>
<td>Indicative Ruling²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7. **Financial interest in the application** | Consider such things such as:  
  - patents pending  
  - supply of goods and services  
  - improved access to facilities  
  - provision of cells/animals or similar to applicant(s) with financial gain/exchange  
  - whether you receive research funding or other support from a company, and the research you have been asked to review by NHMRC may impact upon that company | Yes = Usually high conflict or need for a ruling |
| 8. **Medical Research Institute** | Consider:  
  - employment at the same hospital or Medical Research Institute (eg: Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, and Garvan Institute etc.) | Yes = High Conflict |
| 9. **Other interests or situations** | Also consider:  
  - previous or pending disputes (may require consideration of events earlier than within the last five years) | Yes = High Conflict |
### ATTACHMENT C: NHMRC Project Grants Category Descriptors

The following category descriptors are used to score an application against each of the assessment criteria: 1) Scientific Quality; 2) Significance of the Expected Outcomes and/or Innovation of the Concept; and 3) Team Quality & Capability, relative to opportunity. The Category Descriptors provide GRP members with indicators that should be sampled to guide appropriate scores for each application. The process of consistently referring GRP members to these descriptors is vital to ensuring equity, thoroughness and process consistency both within and across all GRPs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Scientific Quality</th>
<th>Significance and/or Innovation</th>
<th>Track Record – relative to opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **7 Outstanding by International Standards** | 50% | - Significance and/or Innovation:  
  - Significance of the Expected Outcomes AND/OR Innovation of the concept 25% |  
  Relative to opportunity, the applicant **team**:  
  - has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice that is outstanding by international standards commensurate with their field of research.  
  - expertise specifically targets the proposed research both in terms of its depth and breadth.  
  - members have outstanding national and international reputations. |
| **The proposal**:  
  - has objectives that are well-defined, highly coherent and strongly developed.  
  - has a flawless design.  
  - is without question, highly feasible given that all of the required expertise and research tools and techniques are present in the relevant research environment(s). | **The planned research**:  
  - will result in a major advance in knowledge in this field which addresses an issue of great importance to human health.  
  - will translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine or public health or fundamental changes in health policy.  
  - is highly innovative and introduces advances in concept(s).  
  - will likely be the subject of invited plenary presentations at international meetings.  
  - will result in highly influential publications. |  
  Relative to opportunity, the applicant **team**:  
  - has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice that is outstanding by international standards commensurate with their field of research.  
  - expertise specifically targets the proposed research both in terms of its depth and breadth.  
  - members have outstanding national and international reputations. |
| **6 Excellent** |  
  - has objectives that are well-defined, highly coherent and strongly developed.  
  - has a near flawless design.  
  - is highly feasible given the experience, skills and readiness of the team in the relevant research environment(s). | **The planned research**:  
  - will result in a significant advance in knowledge in this field which addresses an issue of significant importance to human health.  
  - is likely to translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine, public health or provide fundamental changes in health policy.  
  - is highly innovative in approach  
  - will likely be the subject of invited plenary presentations at international meetings.  
  - will likely result in influential publications. |  
  Relative to opportunity, the applicant **team**:  
  - has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice that is excellent by international standards commensurate with their field of research.  
  - expertise is highly relevant to the proposed research both in terms of its depth and breadth.  
  - members have excellent national and/or international reputations. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Scientific Quality 50%</th>
<th>Significance and/or Innovation</th>
<th>Track Record – relative to opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Very Good</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proposal:</td>
<td>• is clear in its intent and logical.</td>
<td>• will result in a major advance in knowledge in this field which addresses an issue of importance to human health.</td>
<td>Relative to opportunity, the applicant team:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• raises only minor concerns with respect to the study design.</td>
<td>• may translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine, public health.</td>
<td>• has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice which places it well above average for their peers or cohort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is feasible with most techniques and tools either established or nearly established in the relevant research environment(s).</td>
<td>• is innovative in approach.</td>
<td>• raises only minor concerns regarding the depth and breadth of expertise relevant to the proposed research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Good</strong></td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
<td>The planned research:</td>
<td>Relative to opportunity, the applicant team:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• has clear objectives.</td>
<td>• addresses an issue of importance to human health.</td>
<td>• has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice, that places them above average for their peers/cohorts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• raises several potentially significant concerns regarding study design.</td>
<td>• is unlikely to be the subject of invited plenary presentations at international meetings.</td>
<td>• members have track records in fields relevant to the proposed research but with several potentially significant concerns regarding depth and breadth of relevant expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• will likely be successfully achieved, although some concerns exist about the ongoing need to develop or obtain some research tools or techniques.</td>
<td>• is solid in concept.</td>
<td>• members have good and growing national and/or international reputations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Marginal</strong></td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
<td>The planned research:</td>
<td>Relative to opportunity, the applicant team:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is unsound in terms of some of its objectives.</td>
<td>• addresses an issue of some importance to human health.</td>
<td>• has a combined record of research achievement (quality and productivity) and/or translation into practice, that places them at an average level for their peers/cohorts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• raises several significant concerns regarding the experimental design.</td>
<td>• may have some novel aspects, while others underpin or extend existing knowledge.</td>
<td>• members have made contributions to the field of research but there are significant concerns regarding the depth and breadth of relevant expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• raises some major concerns about the likelihood of successful completion.</td>
<td>• may result in some strong or influential publications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2 Unsatisfactory

**The proposal:**
- contains a number of areas of significant concern regarding the feasibility of the proposal.
- contains several major study design flaws.
- is unlikely to be successfully completed.

**The planned research:**
- addresses an issue of some concern to human health.
- provides a program of research which will not significantly advance current knowledge in the field.
- has relatively little novelty.

Relative to opportunity, the applicant **team**:
- has published only a few works in relevant but other fields of research.
- is deficient in some areas of expertise that will be required to successfully complete the proposed research.
- members have limited track records in the field of the proposed research.

### 1 Poor

**The proposal:**
- contains a research plan which does not seem to be feasible.
- is poorly designed.
- is unlikely to be successfully completed.

**The planned research:**
- does not address an issue of more than marginal concern to human health.
- will not advance current knowledge in the field.
- only follows behind previously well documented and studied concepts or previously well used approaches.

Relative to opportunity, the applicant **team**:
- is not productive to any significant extent in relevant fields.
- is heavily underpowered in terms of relevant expertise required to successfully complete the research program.
- members have track records which do not relate well to the proposed research.

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1 Assessment of Team Quality & Capability should take into account the productivity of the team, including the number of senior authorships and the team’s influence in the field (relevant to the project application) without reference to h-index or journal impact factors. Assessment of research achievement should take into account impact of the team’s research in terms of seminal contributions to new knowledge and/or translation into policy, practice and improved health outcomes. The assessment of Team Quality & Capability should recognise that CIA is the project leader who is responsible for the successful completion of the research proposal. The assessment should also recognise that these descriptors apply to the team, rather than each member of the team individually since more junior members of the team may be integral to achieving the research objectives. Track Record is always assessed relative to opportunity.
ATTACHMENT D: 2013 Guiding Principles for GRP Membership Nomination and Appointments

Nominations and appointments of GRP members should be guided by the following principles:

**Membership turnover:** NHMRC strives to ensure composition of panels is comprised of both experienced and new GRP members by retaining approximately 60 per cent of the 2012 members. Where a member has served for more than three years consecutively, NHMRC endeavours to provide at least one ‘rest year’. This does not exclude those members who have, in the past, served three years consecutively but have not been on a panel recently.

**Member research track record:** NHMRC considers that experience as a researcher, including successful receipt of funding from NHMRC or an equivalent peer review process that is nationally or internationally competitive to be a vital feature of GRP members and thus to the peer review process.

**Member peer review experience:** NHMRC considers that GRP members’ experience in peer review, including for peer-reviewed journals or other funding organisations, is important to ensuring that NHMRC funding is awarded to applications that have been rigorously and fairly assessed against the assessment criteria including project scientific quality, significance or innovation, and applicant team track record in fields relevant to the project.

**Integrity:** NHMRC expects GRP members to exemplify integrity in all involvement with the peer-review process, and must act in good faith in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community for a proper purpose. This includes, but is not limited to, the maintenance of absolute confidentiality and thus, abstaining from improper use of their involvement (or information obtained from their involvement) to gain an advantage for themselves or any person, or to cause detriment to NHMRC. NHMRC expects GRP members to adhere to the principles and practices outlined in Section 6 (Peer Review) of the ‘Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research’, available online at: [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39.pdf).

**Goals**

In determining the final membership across GRPs, NHMRC will also aspire to:

- Retain approximately 60 per cent of membership from one year in the next year’s membership.
- Ensure broad State and Territory representation
- Ensure representation of Members from diverse (location and size) Administering Institutions
- Ensure spread of a single Administering Institution’s applications across appropriate GRPs
- Ensure a balanced representation of gender
- Ensure relevant expertise is included as dictated by application demand
- Minimise the number of instances that panels consider an application(s) submitted by an applicant serving on the same panel.
**ATTACHMENT E: Overview of the 2013 Peer Review Process for Indigenous Health Research Applications**

**APPLICATIONS OPEN – 05 DECEMBER 2012**
Project Grant applications may self-identify as relevant to Indigenous health and medical research in the Research Grant Management System (RGMS); by:
- Answering YES to the "Does this research proposal include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Research or Capacity Building?" question at ‘Part A-A2: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Research’; and/or
- Selecting “Indigenous Health” in the ‘Guide to Peer-Review Areas’ at ‘Part A-RC: Research Classification’ as an indicative peer review panel destination; and/or
- Selecting "Indigenous Health" as a Priority Area in ‘Part B-PSI: Priority/Special Initiatives’.

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE – 19 MARCH 2013**

**ASSIGNERS ACADEMY**
Self-identified Indigenous health research applications are assigned in parallel to a discipline based Assigner and an Indigenous health expert.

- Discipline based Assigners Academy members will secure two External Assessors with expertise relevant to the application’s scientific area.
- Indigenous health expert members of the Assigners Academy verify whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Application is tentatively allocated to the Indigenous Health Grant Review Panel (IGRP). Primary and Secondary Spokespersons may confirm whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Spokespersons confirm that the application is relevant to Indigenous health research and remains on the IGRP to be assessed.

**EXTERNAL ASSESSEORS**
Each External Assessor will submit a report in RGMS that assesses the application against the Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria.

- Verified as an Indigenous health research application
- Verified as not being an Indigenous health research application

**ASSESSOR COMMENTS**
NHMRC releases a combined Assessors Report to the Chief Investigator A (CIA). No scores are released to the CIA.

**APPLICANT RESPONSE**
The CIA is given 10 days to submit their Applicant Response to NHMRC in RGMS. All Indigenous health research applications will be permitted to use an additional page to respond to Assessor comments addressing the Indigenous Criteria, if required.

**INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR**
Where indicated, NHMRC will seek to secure additional independent scientific advice from an additional expert (Independent Scientific Advisor) in the application’s research area.

**IGRP MEETING – 05 AUGUST – 09 AUGUST 2013**
All applications referred to the IGRP are assessed against the Indigenous Criteria and Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria. The IGRP will have an expanded membership and include additional experts that span numerous research disciplines, as appropriate. The Independent Scientific Advisor may be called upon to participate as an application-specific, non-voting advisor to the IGRP to inform discussions related to their assigned application(s).

**APPLICATIONS OPEN – 05 DECEMBER 2012**

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE – 19 MARCH 2013**

**ASSIGNERS ACADEMY**
Self-identified Indigenous health research applications are assigned in parallel to a discipline based Assigner and an Indigenous health expert.

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- Spokespersons confirm that the application is relevant to Indigenous health research and remains on the IGRP to be assessed.

**EXTERNAL ASSESSEORS**
Each External Assessor will submit a report in RGMS that assesses the application against the Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria.

- Verified as an Indigenous health research application
- Verified as not being an Indigenous health research application

**ASSESSOR COMMENTS**
NHMRC releases a combined Assessors Report to the Chief Investigator A (CIA). No scores are released to the CIA.

**APPLICANT RESPONSE**
The CIA is given 10 days to submit their Applicant Response to NHMRC in RGMS. All Indigenous health research applications will be permitted to use an additional page to respond to Assessor comments addressing the Indigenous Criteria, if required.

**INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR**
Where indicated, NHMRC will seek to secure additional independent scientific advice from an additional expert (Independent Scientific Advisor) in the application’s research area.

**IGRP MEETING – 05 AUGUST – 09 AUGUST 2013**
All applications referred to the IGRP are assessed against the Indigenous Criteria and Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria. The IGRP will have an expanded membership and include additional experts that span numerous research disciplines, as appropriate. The Independent Scientific Advisor may be called upon to participate as an application-specific, non-voting advisor to the IGRP to inform discussions related to their assigned application(s).

**APPLICATIONS OPEN – 05 DECEMBER 2012**

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE – 19 MARCH 2013**

**ASSIGNERS ACADEMY**
Self-identified Indigenous health research applications are assigned in parallel to a discipline based Assigner and an Indigenous health expert.

- Discipline based Assigners Academy members will secure two External Assessors with expertise relevant to the application’s scientific area.
- Indigenous health expert members of the Assigners Academy verify whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Application is tentatively allocated to the Indigenous Health Grant Review Panel (IGRP). Primary and Secondary Spokespersons may confirm whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Spokespersons confirm that the application is relevant to Indigenous health research and remains on the IGRP to be assessed.

**EXTERNAL ASSESSEORS**
Each External Assessor will submit a report in RGMS that assesses the application against the Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria.

- Verified as an Indigenous health research application
- Verified as not being an Indigenous health research application

**ASSESSOR COMMENTS**
NHMRC releases a combined Assessors Report to the Chief Investigator A (CIA). No scores are released to the CIA.

**APPLICANT RESPONSE**
The CIA is given 10 days to submit their Applicant Response to NHMRC in RGMS. All Indigenous health research applications will be permitted to use an additional page to respond to Assessor comments addressing the Indigenous Criteria, if required.

**INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR**
Where indicated, NHMRC will seek to secure additional independent scientific advice from an additional expert (Independent Scientific Advisor) in the application’s research area.

**IGRP MEETING – 05 AUGUST – 09 AUGUST 2013**
All applications referred to the IGRP are assessed against the Indigenous Criteria and Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria. The IGRP will have an expanded membership and include additional experts that span numerous research disciplines, as appropriate. The Independent Scientific Advisor may be called upon to participate as an application-specific, non-voting advisor to the IGRP to inform discussions related to their assigned application(s).

**APPLICATIONS OPEN – 05 DECEMBER 2012**

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE – 19 MARCH 2013**

**ASSIGNERS ACADEMY**
Self-identified Indigenous health research applications are assigned in parallel to a discipline based Assigner and an Indigenous health expert.

- Discipline based Assigners Academy members will secure two External Assessors with expertise relevant to the application’s scientific area.
- Indigenous health expert members of the Assigners Academy verify whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Application is tentatively allocated to the Indigenous Health Grant Review Panel (IGRP). Primary and Secondary Spokespersons may confirm whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Spokespersons confirm that the application is relevant to Indigenous health research and remains on the IGRP to be assessed.

**EXTERNAL ASSESSEORS**
Each External Assessor will submit a report in RGMS that assesses the application against the Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria.

- Verified as an Indigenous health research application
- Verified as not being an Indigenous health research application

**ASSESSOR COMMENTS**
NHMRC releases a combined Assessors Report to the Chief Investigator A (CIA). No scores are released to the CIA.

**APPLICANT RESPONSE**
The CIA is given 10 days to submit their Applicant Response to NHMRC in RGMS. All Indigenous health research applications will be permitted to use an additional page to respond to Assessor comments addressing the Indigenous Criteria, if required.

**INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR**
Where indicated, NHMRC will seek to secure additional independent scientific advice from an additional expert (Independent Scientific Advisor) in the application’s research area.

**IGRP MEETING – 05 AUGUST – 09 AUGUST 2013**
All applications referred to the IGRP are assessed against the Indigenous Criteria and Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria. The IGRP will have an expanded membership and include additional experts that span numerous research disciplines, as appropriate. The Independent Scientific Advisor may be called upon to participate as an application-specific, non-voting advisor to the IGRP to inform discussions related to their assigned application(s).

**APPLICATIONS OPEN – 05 DECEMBER 2012**

**APPLICATIONS CLOSE – 19 MARCH 2013**

**ASSIGNERS ACADEMY**
Self-identified Indigenous health research applications are assigned in parallel to a discipline based Assigner and an Indigenous health expert.

- Discipline based Assigners Academy members will secure two External Assessors with expertise relevant to the application’s scientific area.
- Indigenous health expert members of the Assigners Academy verify whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Application is tentatively allocated to the Indigenous Health Grant Review Panel (IGRP). Primary and Secondary Spokespersons may confirm whether the application is relevant to Indigenous health research.
- Spokespersons confirm that the application is relevant to Indigenous health research and remains on the IGRP to be assessed.

**EXTERNAL ASSESSEORS**
Each External Assessor will submit a report in RGMS that assesses the application against the Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria.

- Verified as an Indigenous health research application
- Verified as not being an Indigenous health research application

**ASSESSOR COMMENTS**
NHMRC releases a combined Assessors Report to the Chief Investigator A (CIA). No scores are released to the CIA.

**APPLICANT RESPONSE**
The CIA is given 10 days to submit their Applicant Response to NHMRC in RGMS. All Indigenous health research applications will be permitted to use an additional page to respond to Assessor comments addressing the Indigenous Criteria, if required.

**INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR**
Where indicated, NHMRC will seek to secure additional independent scientific advice from an additional expert (Independent Scientific Advisor) in the application’s research area.

**IGRP MEETING – 05 AUGUST – 09 AUGUST 2013**
All applications referred to the IGRP are assessed against the Indigenous Criteria and Project Grants Funding Rules assessment criteria. The IGRP will have an expanded membership and include additional experts that span numerous research disciplines, as appropriate. The Independent Scientific Advisor may be called upon to participate as an application-specific, non-voting advisor to the IGRP to inform discussions related to their assigned application(s).
ATTACHMENT F: 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.
ATTACHMENT G: Grant Budget

GRPs are required to recommend budgets for:

- ALL applications assessed to be in Category 5 and above;
- Applications in the following area with a category score of 4 and above will also include a discussion on the proposed budget:
  - Indigenous health;
  - Special Initiatives; and
  - New Investigators.

C.1 Eligibility issues

1 The following researchers are ineligible to draw a salary from a Project Grant
   a) Chief Investigators (CIB to CIF) based overseas for the duration of the grant
   b) Associate Investigators (AIs)

2 Applicants requesting funding to support specific research activities to be undertaken overseas must demonstrate that:
   a) the research activity is critical to the successful completion of the project; and
   b) the equipment/resources required for the research activity are not available in Australia.

3 Funding for research support staff who are based overseas may only be considered where this is essential to achieve the aims of the research.

4 Co-funded Clinical Trials will be required to provide evidence of financial commitment of co-funder(s) before the Minister with portfolio responsibility for NHMRC approves NHMRC support of a co-funded Clinical Trials.

C.2 What can be included in the budget

Unless salary funding is being sought on the grant, funding for a grant is dependent on the continuing employment of each of the Chief Investigators over the period of the grant.

The budget for a grant may comprise one or more of the following elements:

- Personnel Support Packages (PSPs) – see Section C2-2;
- Direct Research Costs (DRCs) – see Section C2-3; and
- Equipment – see Section C2-4.

Each GRP’s Chair, Assistant Chair and NHMRC secretariat will record the budgets using these categories and under no circumstances are any other budget items to be considered.

When in doubt of what to include in the budget ask the question: Should a responsible institution with research as part of its mission supply the item or meet the cost in question as a precondition of its participation in research?

If you cannot answer this question with certainty, refer the matter for determination to the GRP Chair or NHMRC secretariat.

C2-1 Support for Personnel

Researchers who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents in Australia:

- Are eligible to apply for a Project Grant as Chief Investigator B to J;
- Are permitted to request a Personnel Support Package if they are based in Australia for the duration of the grant; but
- Are not permitted to request a Personnel Support Package if they are based overseas.
Associate Investigators are not permitted to request salary from a NHMRC grant.

Funding for research support staff who are based overseas may only be considered where this is essential to achieve the aims of the research.

Casual computing and similar casual staff requirements, which will be contracted at hourly rates, should be included under DRCs.

Funds to support personnel, Personnel Support Packages (PSPs), are provided as salary line. The level of PSP requested in an application should match the roles and responsibilities of the position, rather than the expertise of a specific person whom the CIs may intend to appoint to the position. Information on PSP amounts can be found at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/apply/projects/budget.htm.

C 2-2 Personnel Support Packages (PSPs)

PSPs are the upper limit of funds that the NHMRC will provide for personnel salary support.

PSPs are designed to contribute to salary and salary on-costs (e.g. payroll tax, workers compensation, leave loading, compulsory and contributory superannuation and long service leave). Administering Institutions should seek their own advice on any potential taxation implications. Any additional amounts required to cover the salary and related costs of personnel will need to be found from non-NHMRC sources. Five levels of PSPs are available:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSP Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>$ amounts per annum (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSP1</td>
<td>Technical support - non-graduate personnel</td>
<td>$50,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP2</td>
<td>Junior graduate research assistant</td>
<td>$63,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP3</td>
<td>Experienced graduate research assistant/Junior postdoctoral research officer</td>
<td>$69,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP4</td>
<td>Experienced postdoctoral researcher (i.e., a researcher who would normally be considered as a named investigator on the research application and/or approaching the NHMRC CDF (formerly CDA) scheme or equivalent)</td>
<td>$82,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP5</td>
<td>Senior experienced postdoctoral researcher (i.e. a researcher who would normally be considered as a named investigator on the research application and is more than 10 years post doctoral and/or would be expected to have applied for or held an NHMRC CDF (formerly CDA) or equivalent)</td>
<td>$88,881</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These PSPs will apply in each year of the grant and no additional funds will be provided. An annual indexation will be applied to PSPs. The indexation rate is based on the Commonwealth Government Wage Cost Index^3 (WCI).

C 2-3 Direct Research Costs

For NHMRC funding purposes direct research costs are costs that are integral to carrying out the approved research objectives of a grant where the recipient is selected on merit against a set of criteria. Such costs must directly address the research objectives of the grant, relate to the approved research plan and require the associated budget to have been properly justified. (These costs will be critically reviewed by GRPs during deliberations on budget allocations and by NHMRC during the conduct of on-site compliance monitoring visits).

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^3 Related information can be obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, see http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6345.0Explanatory%20Notes1Sep%202012?OpenDocument.
DRCs are available in multiples of $5,000. Individual items of equipment costing less than $10,000 must be requested as DRC.

**Direct research costs may include the following:**

- personnel costs only related to contract staff and limited external persons – must not include AI or CI or PSP supported elsewhere by the application. Must include detailed justification need and costing basis.
- inclusion of materials required to conduct the approved research – laboratory supplies, consumables, printed materials, microfilms, purchase costs of animals
- survey or field expenses that have been fully justified in the application
- Medicare costs (out of pocket medical expenses)
- reimbursement of reasonable costs associated with randomised control (RCT) trials studies
- reasonable medical diagnosis costs (MRI, PET, CT, ultrasound, genotyping, biochemical analysis)
- equipment costing less than $10,000 that is unique to the project and is essential for the completion of the project
- purchases of services directly required for the successful conduct of the project
- costs of animal agistment and animals purchased that are a direct requirement of the research project
- specialised computing requirements that are essential to meeting project specific needs
- travel, conference and publication costs – refer to guidelines on NHMRC website (see below)

Note: NHMRC research funds can only be acquitted as direct research costs if the conference and related travel costs are directly related to the approved research objectives and attendance at the conference is for the purpose of presenting the outcomes of the research funded.

NHMRC research funds can only be used for reasonable publication costs where the publication has occurred as the result of the approved research activity. Where this is the case, all expenditure is to be in accordance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007*. **Publication costs cannot be requested on an application but may be listed as a legitimate cost against DRC as part of the financial acquittal process.**


**Indirect Research Costs**

Indirect costs of research are institution overhead costs that benefit and support research. They can include such things as the operations and maintenance of buildings, use of facilities and libraries, hazardous waste disposal, regulatory and research compliance and administration of research services. Although they are necessary for the conduct of research, and although they may be incurred in the course of research, they are costs that do not directly address the approved research objectives of a grant.
The GRPs budget recommendation cannot include support for indirect research costs including indirect costs such as those outlined below:

- indirect costs of research
- networking costs
- institutional overheads and administrative costs
- personal membership of professional organisations and groups
- non project related staff training and development costs
- research infrastructure – facilities necessary to the research endeavour that a responsible Institution would be expected to supply as a prerequisite to its engagement in research.

This includes:

- physical space and all the services associated with it
- furniture for research staff
- administrative services
- office services and laboratory services
- ethics approval costs
- staff training and development
- animal house facilities
- computer networks and basic network utilities
- personal computers, related network peripherals and software needed for communicating, writing and undertaking simple analyses (Scholarship grant holders, however, may purchase laptops – refer Direct Costs above)

- health insurance, travel insurance, foreign currency, airport and related travel taxes
- personal subscriptions (private journal subscriptions)
- communications costs (mobiles, telephone calls)
- patent costs
- entertainment and hospitality costs
- airline club memberships
- purchase of reprints
- car rental

C 2-4 Equipment

Equipment items over $10,000 require justification in the budget request. Individual equipment items costing less than $10,000 are included as Direct Research Costs. Applicants may not seek funding for equipment totalling more than $80,000 for the entire period of the grant.

The equipment requested should be unique to the project and must be essential for the project to proceed.

Funds will not be provided for:

- the purchase of computers, except where these are an integral component of a piece of laboratory equipment or are of a nature essential for work in the field.
- the type of apparatus normally provided from institutional funds such as freezers, etc.

Applicants must provide detail as to why the equipment is not being provided by their institution. For each item of equipment requested, a written quotation must be received and held with the Research Office of the Administering Institution and must be available to the NHMRC on request. The applicant must ensure the Administering Institution is prepared to meet all service and repair costs in relation to equipment awarded.

An annual Wage Cost Index (WCI) indexation\(^4\) will be applied to equipment.

Equipment-only applications are not acceptable on Project Grants applications.

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C 2-5 Using Research Facilities

Biospecimen and Associated Data

Requests for biospecimens and associated data must be fully justified in the DRC component of the application form.

The NHMRC will support the costs of biospecimens and associated data that are a direct requirement of the research project. Biospecimen and associated data costs must be based upon published cost recovery schedules of biobanks or similar accredited bodies (e.g. Pathology services). An indicative list of these is available below. Such costs will typically represent cost recovery for the costs of collection, processing, storage and distribution. Consideration for additional project development and management costs for utilising biospecimens and associated data may be requested.

Given the significant expansion in biobank activities in Australia in the last decade, any future proposal for prospective funding of a biobank must specify why the samples cannot already be sourced from an existing biobank. Any proposal to establish a new biospecimen collection should seek to use infrastructure or services provided by biobanks or similar accredited bodies. Comprehensive justification for not using one of these must be provided.

Following is an indicative list of Biobanks and services that provide services based upon international standards of best practice (ISBER):

- Australian Ovarian Cancer Study http://www.aocstudy.org/
- Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank www.schizophreniaresearch.org.au
- Cancer Institute NSW Biobanking Network. Including GynBioBank
- Kolling Institute of Medical Research Neuroendocrine, Gynaecological, Breast and Upper GI Banks
- Genetic Repositories Australia (GRA) http://www.neura.edu.au/GRA
- Lowy Biorepository http://powcs.med.unsw.edu.au/research/adult-cancerprogram/services-resources/biorepository
- NATA Accredited Pathology Practices
- NSW Children’s Hospital Network
- The Leukaemia and Lymphoma Tissue Bank A joint research initiative of ALLG and the Leukaemia Foundation email: allg_tissue_bank@health.qld.gov.au
- Victorian Cancer Biobank www.viccancerbiobank.org.au
- WA Research Tissue Network (Operated by St John of God HealthCare)
- Wesley Institute
Other Research Facilities

The costs of utilising the services of other research facilities can also be sought through DRCs. Examples of organisations that are included in this category include Non-Human Primate colonies, the Australian Twin Registry, Cell Bank Australia, the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group (TROG) and suppliers of clinical trials services. This list is illustrative and is by no means exhaustive.

Researchers should consult with research facilities to ensure that the services they are seeking DRC funding for can be provided and that the research budgets reflect these charges. Letters from research facilities confirming their collaboration should be included with the application to assist the Grant Review Panel in assessing the application.

C 2-6 Conduct of Human Clinical Trials

Funding may be provided to cover liability insurance for human clinical trials. This budget request will need to be fully justified in the DRC component of the application form.

C 2-7 Animal Agistment Costs

Requests for animal agistment costs must be justified in the DRC component of the application.

The NHMRC will support the costs of animal agistment that are a direct requirement of the research project. Animal agistment costs may include the costs of food and caging, and of experimental breeding, during the course of the project. The purchase of animals should be included in the budget under DRCs.

The NHMRC will not support infrastructure costs that should normally be provided by the Animal House of the host institution (such as administration or support of Animal House staff) regardless of whether or not the institution has its own Animal House.

C 2-8 Registration of clinical trials

All NHMRC funded clinical trials must be registered in the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR), or equivalent, prior to commencement of the clinical phase.

Applicants proposing to undertake a randomised controlled trial may request the administrative charge payable for the registration of the trial. Requests for funding of trial registration must be justified in the DRC component of the application.

Information pertaining to the ANZCTR, or equivalent, and how to register can be found at: http://www.anzctr.org.au.
ATTACHMENT H: Process for Final Ranking

Each GRP is required to provide NHMRC with a list of category 5 (and, where needed, category 4) applications in rank order from ‘best-in-category’ to ‘least competitive-in-category’.

At the end of the week (or on completion of review of all applications), applications with a category score of:
- 6 and 7 are expected to be well above the funding cut off;
- 4 or 5 will be considered fundable and may be recommended for funding depending upon budget limitations; and
- 3 and below will not be recommended for funding.

NHMRC expects that each GRP has reviewed all applications against the Category Descriptors in a fair and equitable manner during the GRP meetings.

Where a GRP member believes an application may have been reviewed in an inconsistent manner, this matter should have been raised with the NHMRC Chair during the daily reconciliation and further review of applications (as consistent with Section 6.7, Step 7).

The intention of the Final Ranking process is to allow each GRP the opportunity to review the preliminary Order of Merit and in considering the ranking of the applications, identify those that may benefit from re-ranking. There will not be a revote of any application during Final Ranking.

However, all proposed movements will need to be justified and have consensus from the panel.

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**Step 1 – Adjustment to the Order of Merit**

NHMRC will produce an individualised list of applications allocated to Categories 5 (and 4 where applicable) for each GRP member, excluding those applications for which the individual panel member is in conflict.

GRP members will be asked to confirm the Order of Merit or identify applications that they feel may require adjustment to their ranking. GRP members with a CoI with a nominated application(s) will leave the room prior to the panel discussing the application(s). This process will be facilitated by NHMRC staff with assistance from the Chair.

Where an application is identified for adjustment, a quorum must be present for the application to be re-ranked by the panel.

GRP members are reminded that 50 per cent of the assessment should be based on Scientific Quality, and so this may be used to appropriately focus the GRP discussions. NHMRC will record any changes to the ranked positions.

The GRP Chair will continue to ensure that each application is discussed in a fair manner. Where the GRP Chair is in conflict with any of the applications, a Senior NHMRC staff member or potentially an experienced member with no conflict will assume the role of Chair.

**Step 2 – Confirmation of Order of Merit**

Once NHMRC has recorded the changes to the Order of Merit, an individualised report of the final ranking of applications will be produced for each member, excluding those applications for which the individual panel member is in conflict. Each panel member will sign their agreement to the Order of Merit.
ATTACHMENT I: Example Template for GRP Assessment Summary

PREPARATION OF THE GRP ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Following completion of the assessment of each application, the assessment criteria and overall category scores are confirmed with the panel (see Section 6.7, Step 7). This information will form the basis of the GRP Assessment Summary. The RGMS generated report will include information pertaining to:

- Scores for each of the assessment criteria;
- An overview of application scores; and
- How the applicants score compared to other applications in their field

APP10xxxxx GRP Assessment Summary

Your 2013 Project Grants application was scored as Category X following its review by expert peers. It was ranked in the Xth quartile of Category X applications.

Table 1 summarises the assessment of your application against the Project Grants Assessment Criteria. Table 2 summarises the proportion of 2013 Project Grants applications in each Category.

**Table 1:** Summary of scores for your application in relation to the assessment criteria, and overall Category score. Criteria scores are the GRP mean. The Category score is calculated from the weighted criteria scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Scores for APP10xxxxx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Quality – 50%</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance and/or Innovation – 25%</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track Record – 25%</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Category</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Summary of all assessed 2013 Project Grants applications by overall Category, including the mean for each criterion ± 1 standard deviation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number and Proportion (%) of applications in Category</th>
<th>Mean Scientific Quality</th>
<th>Mean Significance and/or Innovation</th>
<th>Mean Track Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤3</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APP10xxxx GRP Assessment Summary

Your application was assessed to be among the least competitive 33% of applications received. For guidance relating to your application please refer to comments made in your Assessors Report.