Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

IDEAS GRANTS

2019 PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES

1 INTRODUCTION

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for managing the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research in a manner consistent with Commonwealth legislation and guidelines. NHMRC has a responsibility to ensure taxpayers' funds are invested appropriately to support the best health and medical research. Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Ideas Grants peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation and guidelines
- how to declare and manage conflicts of interest (CoI)
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- *Ideas Grants 2019 Guidelines*, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.

2 PRINCIPLES, CONDUCT AND OBLIGATIONS DURING PEER REVIEW

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

2.1 NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review

NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) are high-level, guiding statements that underpin all NHMRC's peer review processes, and include:

- **Fairness.** Peer review processes are fair and seen to be fair by all.
- **Transparency.** Applies to all stages of peer review.
- **Independence.** Peer reviewers provide independent advice. There is also independent oversight of peer review processes by independent Chairs and Observers.
- **Appropriateness and balance.** There is appropriate experience, expertise and representation of peer reviewers assessing applications.
- **Research community participation.** Persons holding taxpayer-funded grants should willingly make themselves available to participate in peer review processes, whenever possible.
- **Confidentiality.** Participants respect that confidentiality is important to the fairness and robustness of peer review.
- **Impartiality.** Peer review is objective and impartial, with appropriate processes in place to manage real and perceived CoI.
- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

Additional details underpinning the Principles can be found at Attachment A.

2.2 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research[1]

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) requires researchers participating in peer review do so in a way that is 'fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content'.

The Code can be found on the NHMRC website at: https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018.

2.3 Disclosure of interests

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests[2] of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with Part 5, section 42A of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act), sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*[3] and the *NHMRC's Privacy Policy*.

This is to ensure that where a material personal interest arises, the individual will not be in a position to influence, or perceive to influence, the proper performance of the participant's responsibilities to NHMRC. The perception of an interest is as important as any actual interest.

2.3.1 What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)?

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.

For NHMRC peer review purposes, interests 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.

Researchers frequently have a CoI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often

[1] The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018* was released in June 2018 and institutions are expected to meet the requirements of the 2018 Code no later than 1 July 2019.
[2] An 'Interest' is defined in section 4 of the NHMRC Act as meaning 'any direct or indirect, pecuniary or non-pecuniary, interest'. Under section *29* of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), 'an official … who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest'.
[3] Made under subsection 29(2) of the PGPA Act.

need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under consideration. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

An outline of potential CoI situations is provided for peer reviewers at Attachment B.

2.3.2 Failure to declare an interest

The NHMRC Act requires interests 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.
- Paragraph Section 44B(3)(b) requires the Minister or the CEO to terminate the appointment of a member for failing to comply, without reasonable excuse, with the disclosure of interest requirements outlined in the NHMRC Act.

It is important for participants to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process.

2.4 Research integrity issues

The scrutiny of an application during peer review can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information). Where such concerns arise, peer reviewers should raise these issues separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to do this is provided at Attachment C. Peer reviewers should not discuss their concerns with other assessors, as this may affect the impartiality of the review.

Where a peer reviewer identifies possible issues about research integrity, these are managed by NHMRC through a separate process. Applications that are the subject of a research misconduct allegation will continue to progress through NHMRC peer review processes while any investigations are ongoing. NHMRC liaises with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation, and, if necessary, will take action under the NHMRC policy on misconduct related to NHMRC funding (the Misconduct Policy) available on the NHMRC website at: https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-policy-misconduct.

2.4.1 Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Reviewers directly engaged with the peer review of an application must not contact applicants about their application. Similarly, applicants are not allowed to make contact or attempt to influence anyone who is directly engaged with its peer review about their application. When a reviewer contacts an applicant, the consequences may be removal of the reviewer from the process, and potential exclusion from future NHMRC peer review. When an applicant contacts a reviewer, consequences could include exclusion of an application/s from consideration. In either case, contact between applicants and reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

2.5 Freedom of Information

NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of

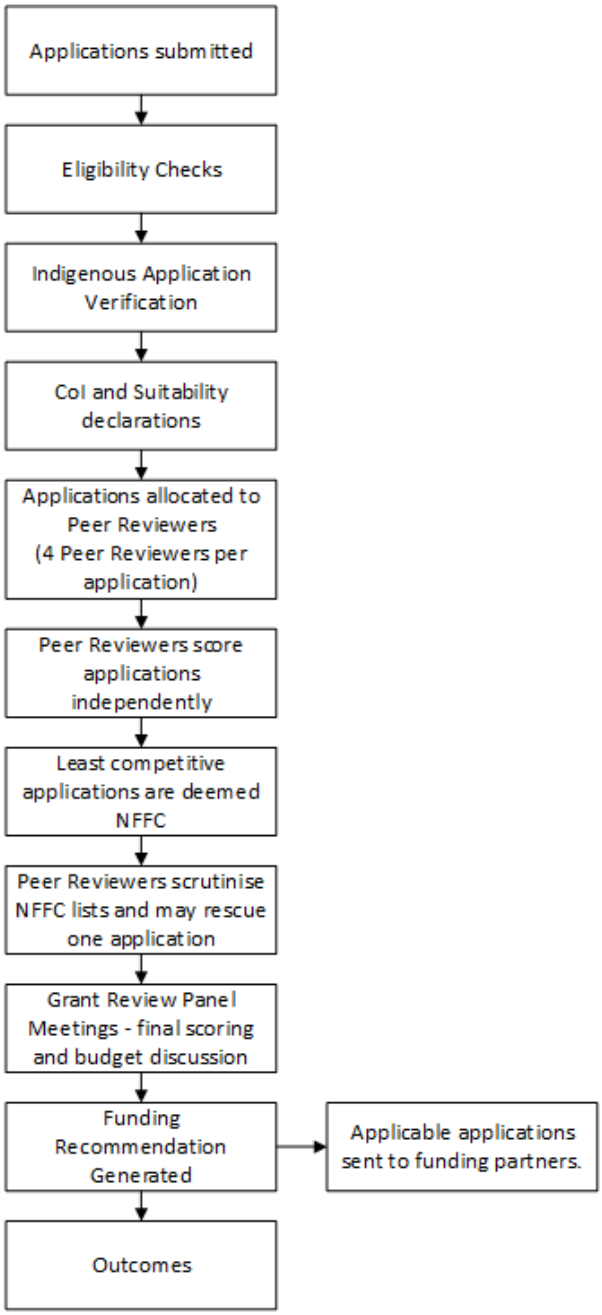
a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

2.6 Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process that may be received from applicants. As part of these dealings, NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information regarding the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the NHMRC website at: https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-complaints-policy.

3 IDEAS GRANTS PEER REVIEW PROCESS

3.1 Overview of the Ideas Grants peer review process



Indicative Timeline

Date	Activity
8 May 2019	Deadline for Ideas Grants application submission
15 - 31 May 2019	Peer reviewers declare Conflicts of Interest (CoI) and nominate Spokesperson (SP) suitability against applications
11 - 21 June 2019	Week 1 - 3 applications allocated to panels and Spokespersons assigned.
24 June - 19 July 2019	Week 1 - 3 Peer reviewers assess applications and submit scores against Ideas Grant Assessment Criteria
1 - 12 July 2019	Week 4 - 6 applications allocated to panels and Spokespersons assigned.
15 July - 9 August 2019	Week 4 - 6 Peer reviewers assess applications and submit scores against Ideas Grant Assessment Criteria
25 - 26 July 2019	Week 1 - 3 least competitive applications are deemed NFFC
26 - 30 July 2019	Week 1 - 3 peer review members consider NFFC list and may rescue one application
12 - 13 August 2019	Week 4 - 6 least competitive applications are deemed NFFC
16 - 20 August 2019	Week 4 - 6 peer review members consider NFFC list and may rescue one application
12 August - 20 September 2019	Grant Review Panel (GRP) meetings held in Canberra
November 2019	Notification of outcomes

3.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the Ideas Grants peer review process are identified in the table below.

Ideas Grants peer review participants table

Roles	Responsibilities
Panel Chair (Chair)	The Chair's role is to ensure NHMRC's procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being discussed at the GRP meeting. Chairs are independent of the review of applications, and must manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide. Prior to the GRP meeting the Chair will: • familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panels • familiarise themselves with ALL the applications to be considered by their panels, excluding those for which they have declared a high CoI. During the GRP meeting the Chair will: • take appropriate action for each declared CoI • keep discussions on time and focused • ensure NHMRC procedures are followed

Roles	Responsibilities
	• assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them • promote good engagement by peer reviewers in all discussions • ensure the discussion leads to an outcome where the applications are appropriately considered against the Ideas Grant Assessment Criteria (assessment criteria) using the Ideas Grant Category Descriptors (category descriptors) • ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of discussions for each application • ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the meeting's deliberations • record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice • approve the Meeting Attendance Record sheet.
Indigenous Health Research Grant Review Panel (IGRP)	Applications deemed to relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research will be considered by suitable Assessors with appropriate discipline based expertise and an Indigenous Health Research Grant Review Panel (IGRP). NHMRC will aim to have Indigenous researchers constitute at least 50 percent of the IGRP's membership. Advice on the IGRP membership will be sought from the relevant NHMRC Indigenous Advisor. The IGRP may be supported by additional independent scientific advisors to inform its assessment of applications. If required, IGRP members will advise NHMRC if an application allocated to the IGRP does not relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
Peer Reviewers	Prior to the GRP meeting peer reviewers will: • familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel • provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Ideas Grant assessment criteria for each application assigned to them where no high CoI exists, in a timely manner • Confirm the inclusion of applications on the NFFC list and 'rescue' up to one application that warrants discussion if they deem it appropriate. During the GRP meeting peer reviewers will: • score each application using RGMS e-scoring • recommend applications for Marshall and Warren award discussion where appropriate • prepare for and participate in the panel discussion for each application including budget discussion, where applicable.
Primary Spokesperson (1SP)	Prior to the GRP meeting: • review the allocated applications against the assessment criteria • advise NHMRC of any applications where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective • score the applications against the Category Descriptors • prepare speaking notes to present the application at the GRP meeting • if applicable, review the Cancer Australia Priority-driven Collaborative Cancer Research Scheme (PdCCRS) proposal against the Category Descriptors and prepare a recommendation for the GRP to either provide the same score to Cancer Australia or rescore. • rigorously assess the proposed budget to ensure that Personal Support Packages (PSPs), Direct Research Costs (DRCs) and equipment requests are appropriate for

Roles	Responsibilities
	the project and fully justified. At the GRP meeting: • lead the discussion using prepared notes • announce final scores for applications based on discussions • support the 2SP in discussion about the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the requested budget as required with reference to the individual elements of the budget, ensuring PSPs, DRCs and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified.
Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)	Prior to the GRP meeting: • review the allocated applications against the assessment criteria • advise NHMRC of any applications where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective • score the applications against the Category Descriptors • prepare speaking notes to present the application at the GRP meeting • rigorously assess 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 • prepare a recommendation for the GRP to: leave the requested budget intact, modify the budget, or seek advice from the panel on specific budget requests. At the GRP meeting: • add to the 1SP comments using prepared notes • announce final scores for applications based on discussions • discuss the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the requested budget as required with reference to the individual elements of the budget, ensuring PSPs, DRCs and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified.
Spokespersons (3SP & 4SP)	Prior to the GRP meeting: • review the allocated applications against the assessment criteria • advise NHMRC of any applications where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective • score the applications against the Category Descriptors. At the GRP meeting: • support the 1SP and 2SP in discussion with reference to prepared notes.
NHMRC Scientific Staff	NHMRC staff with doctoral degrees or extensive research experience may be involved in: • reviewing allocation of applications and peer reviewers to panels • assisting and advising on the peer review process.
NHMRC Staff	Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities, as listed below: Prior to the GRP meetings NHMRC staff will: • approach potential peer reviewers and Chairs • rule on level of declared CoIs • act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers • provide briefings to peer reviewers • determine eligibility of applications

Roles	Responsibilities
	• assign applications and peer reviewers to the appropriate panel • following scoring by SPs, prepare provisional ranked lists for panel consideration. At the GRP meeting NHMRC staff will: • support the operation of e-scoring in NHMRC's Research Grants Management System (RGMS) • assist the Chair in running the discussions • manage the CoI process, including maintaining accurate records, ensuring all participants (including community observers) are aware of all declared CoIs • ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application • maintain scoring records for each application • record budget discussions in RGMS • act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers • seek feedback from Chairs, peer reviewers and community observers on improvements to processes.
Community Observers	Panels may have independent community observers present during GRP meetings. NHMRC invites respected members of the general community to sit in on a proportion of the GRP meetings to observe whether NHMRC policy and procedures are being adhered to. The observers assist NHMRC in ensuring that the assessment of all applications is fair, equitable and impartial. Observers will be briefed on procedures prior to the meeting. They will not participate in the discussion of any application, and will be identified and introduced by the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting. At the GRP meeting observers will: • identify and advise the Chair of all real or perceived conflicts they have with applications to be discussed • monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting • provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across meetings. Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff. Observers are subject to the same CoI requirements as panel members. Where a high CoI exists, the observer will leave the meeting.

3.3 Reviewing Ideas Grants applications

All Ideas Grants applications are assessed against the *Ideas Grant 2019 Assessment Criteria* (Attachment E) and *Ideas Grant 2019 Category Descriptors* (Attachment F). Further guidance on assessing applications against the Ideas Grant assessment criteria is provided at Attachment G.

Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 3.3.2) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Attachment D). Further guidance on assessing applications against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* is provided at Attachment G.

3.3.1 Receipt and initial processing of applications

NHMRC staff will verify that Ideas Grants applications meet the eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised, via their RAOs, if their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed by NHMRC staff. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process.

3.3.2 Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health will be identified by information provided in the application. Researchers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will check whether these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* from a peer reviewer with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The applicants response to the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Attachment D) will be considered by peer reviewers when scoring against the *Ideas Grant 2019 Category Descriptors* (Attachment F).

For further information see *Guidance for Assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Attachment G).

3.3.3 Establishment of grant review panels

The number of grant review panels (panels) formed will depend on the total number and type of applications received.

3.3.4 Assignment of applications to panels

Applications are allocated to a panel primarily based on the applicant's nominated peer review areas. Allocation may also be informed by the proposed field of research and other key words entered into RGMS. Where the applicant has nominated a peer review area that is unlikely to provide appropriate expertise, NHMRC scientific staff will identify an appropriate panel to conduct the peer review.

3.3.5 Identification of CoIs and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with an overview of applications within RGMS and will declare their CoIs in accordance with the guidelines provided at section 2.3 and Attachment B.

Some peer reviewers may have a CoI for which they require a ruling. For these, NHMRC will assess the information in the declaration made by the peer reviewer and specify a level of peer review participation in RGMS.

Peer reviewers are required to include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate CoI assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. If the Chair or a peer reviewer is uncomfortable with a ruling level, they can raise this with NHMRC staff and request a review.

CoIs are declared at the beginning of the peer review process. However, CoIs must be declared at any

stage of the peer review process if new conflicts become apparent. Any reviewer who has a 'high' CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application, but they can provide scientific advice, on request from the Chair, if required.

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of peer reviewer suitability for applications, based on the information available to them in the application summary.

3.3.6 Allocation of peer reviewers to panels

Taking into account CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign peer reviewers to panels of approximately 16 members. It is expected each panel will be assigned approximately 80 applications, however this is subject to change, depending on the number and peer review area of applications.

3.3.7 Briefing

NHMRC will provide briefing material for peer review participants that will provide further detail on peer reviewer duties and the responsibilities associated with the Ideas Grants peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to reviewing applications. Further information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process.

3.3.8 Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high CoI exists) and will be required to review and subsequently enter their scores via RGMS. Peer reviewers will review and score all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the category descriptors.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores are completed within RGMS by the nominated due date. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements.

Peer reviewers should not discuss applications with other peer reviewers. This is to ensure peer reviewers provide completely independent scores.

Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create provisional ranked lists of applications for each panel. The least competitive applications will form a preliminary Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list and will be provided to respective panel members before the GRP meeting. Each panel member has the opportunity to rescue one application from the NFFC list if they believe an application warrants full review at the GRP meeting. Once the NFFC list has been finalised, the GRP secretariat will release a running order for the GRP meeting. Applications not on the NFFC list will proceed to full review.

An application will be excluded from NFFC for the following reasons:

- NHMRC has not received a score and an assessment for all criteria from at least three SPs
- If a high CoI is declared by a SP after the initial assessment has been undertaken
- The application may be excluded if it relates to an NHMRC strategic research investment priority, as determined by NHMRC, and achieves a notional score of 4.001 or higher.

3.3.8.1 Assessment of PdCCRS applications

Applicants who are seeking funding from Cancer Australia's PdCCRS as well as from NHMRC for the same project must provide a one page modified research proposal if the project exceeds limitations imposed by PdCCRS grant categories – for example, amount of funding or project duration. The modified proposal must set out the reduced aims, timeframes, and/or budget of the PdCCRS project.

As part of their assessment, the 1SP should review the modified proposal, considering whether the reduced scope would require a different score against any of the assessment criteria. If the 1SP believes the score for the application should be amended for the modified proposal, the 1SP must be prepared to make a recommendation to the panel at the GRP meeting. Discussion of the PdCCRS component of the application is 'by exception' only.

3.3.8.2 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

It is not appropriate to use journal based metrics such as Journal Impact Factors or the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List when assessing applications.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) makes recommendations for improving the evaluation of research assessment. NHMRC is a signatory of DoRA and adheres to the recommendations, as outlined in DoRA (https://sfdora.org/read/), for its peer review processes.

3.3.8.3 Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

As outlined in the Code, peer reviewers are required to consider the general strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design of the proposal to ensure robust and unbiased results. Assessment of the experimental design should include consideration of the scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal?), effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study, sex and gender elements of the research to maximise impact and any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

3.3.9 GRP meetings

Each GRP will meet for up to five days (depending on the number of applications per panel) to review the most competitive applications allocated to the panel, as identified through the NFFC process.

Quorum
A quorum is regarded as 50 percent plus one of the appointed members. If there is an uneven number of members, a majority is the next full number after 50 percent (e.g., seven in the case of 13 members). In situations where a number of members have identified a high CoI on an application, the scoring quorum cannot be less than one-third of the GRP membership present at the meeting.

NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to GRP meetings, those applications that do not have a scoring quorum and obtain a suitably qualified member from another GRP to participate in panel discussion and to score that application.

Declaration of inter-relationships
Suggested time limit: 30 minutes

When members (including the Chair and Secretariat) meet face-to-face for the first time, each panel member will be invited to briefly describe their expertise and previous peer review experience. During their introductions, members will be asked to declare any relationships with other panel members including:

- current and previous collaborations
- former student/teacher/mentoring relationships
- common employment/institutional relationships

- other relationships that may, or be perceived to, impair fair and impartial assessment.

Chair to announce the application
Suggested time limit: 2 minutes

The Chair will announce the application to be discussed including the title, Administering Institution/s and the CIs.

The Chair will identify any members who have previously identified a CoI with the application. Those members with a high CoI will be asked to leave the room.

The Chair will invite members to declare any late CoI 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 discussed with the panel. It is up to the remaining panel members to determine if the new interest constitutes a high CoI and if the declaring panel member should leave the room. The details of the late CoI will be recorded by NHMRC. As this decision making can take extra time, it is important that all CoIs are declared and decided upon well in advance of the meeting, where possible.

If a CoI is declared at the GRP meeting by a SP, which prevents them from participating in the assessment of the application, a new SP will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial Spokesperson will be discarded. Discussion of the application will be moved to later in the week where possible to give the new SP time to prepare.

Once highly conflicted members have left the room (those with a low CoI remain in the panel room), the Chair will announce the category of funding the application relates to (e.g., NHMRC and/or Cancer Australia). The Chair will then identify the Primary and Secondary Spokespersons and announce the Spokesperson scores for each of the four assessment criteria.

1SP and 2SP to comment on the application
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes (1SP) and 3 minutes (2 SP)

The Primary and Secondary Spokespersons will:

- discuss the application's strengths and weaknesses against the assessment criteria, referring to the Category Descriptors
- (2SP only to add anything not addressed by the 1SP, or explain why they disagree with the 1SP, if applicable).
- not make reference to the budget at this stage.

Full panel discussion
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

The Chair will open discussion to the panel, including to the 3SP and 4SP. GRP members have an opportunity to ask questions of all Spokespersons, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are taken into account.

The Chair must ensure adequate review of the application occurs, that all members get a fair opportunity to comment and that no member exerts undue influence over others.

Scoring by members
Suggested time limit: 3 minutes

Following the panel's discussion, the Chair will ask the Primary and Secondary Spokespersons to confirm their three criterion scores noting that these may change as a result of the panel discussion.

The Chair will then ask if any member intends to score two or more away from the Primary or Secondary SP's criterion scores. If so, the member must declare this and provide a brief justification, which will be recorded by the secretariat.

All members in the room, excluding the Chair, must independently score the application through RGMS e-scoring. All scoring members will provide scores against the four assessment criteria using the seven-point scale outlined in the *Ideas Grant 2019 Category Descriptors* (Attachment F) as reference. While the category descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met. Peer reviewers should consider this and ensure the entire seven-point scale is considered when scoring applications.

At the completion of scoring, the GRP secretariat will announce the following results:

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.

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

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

Where members have concerns regarding the final score, the Chair should invite further discussion. If the panel collectively determines that reassessment is warranted, members will be invited to independently rescore that application. Panel members should not aim to achieve a consensus score, nor take into consideration the potential overall ranking or funding outcome of an application.

Discussion by exception of Cancer Australia PdCCRS applications (where applicable)
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

Discussion of the PdCCRS component of applications will be by exception only, following scoring of the application by the entire panel. If the score for each criterion is in line with the 1SP's recommendation for the PdCCRS modified proposal, then no discussion needs to occur.

If the panel score for any criterion is not reflective of the 1SP's recommendation for the PdCCRS modified proposal, the 1SP should recommend that a different score be provided to Cancer Australia for that criterion. Panel members should agree on the amended score, which will be recorded by the secretariat. NHMRC will provide the amended score to Cancer Australia.

Discussion by exception of proposed budget
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

Budget discussions should not commence until the NHMRC secretariat has announced the rating and category. Once the category has been announced, the secretariat will advise which applications may progress to budget discussion.

Budget discussions occur only where the 2SP has made a recommendation to discuss the budget. The Chair will facilitate the budget discussion to ensure applications are considered fairly and equitably. The 2SP will lead the budget discussion and comment on the appropriateness of the outlined costs and provide recommendations. The other SPs should be prepared to assist if required. Other panel members may also provide relevant comments. Where the GRP deems the proposed budget exceeds that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended and reasons recorded by the NHMRC Secretariat.

NHMRC will record budget recommendations as agreed by the panel. NHMRC will check the budget recommendations to ensure the budgets have been recorded correctly and approved by the Chair.

NHMRC research staff may amend the budget recommended by the GRP for any application if deemed necessary. NHMRC reserves the right to recommend funding levels which are less than those requested in the application and a duration of funding which differs from that requested.

3.3.10 Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a Condition of Funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a rare event. When this does occur, the panel will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and ensure conditions are unambiguous and able to be assessed.

CoFs relate to the awarding of funding, the continuation of funding or the level of funding. They do not relate to conditions which affect either eligibility to apply or subsequent peer review.

The principles are:

- NHMRC seeks to minimise the administrative burden on researchers and Administering Institutions.
- CoFs must not relate to the competitiveness of an application (e.g. project requires more community engagement); these issues should be considered during peer review and be reflected in the scores for the application.
- Any CoFs must be clear and measurable, so that the condition can be readily assessed as having been met.

3.3.11 Panel documentation

Peer reviewers must retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until the outcomes of the panel's deliberations are finalised. For GRP meetings, this is when the final scores have been determined. After this time, both hard copy and electronic notes must be disposed of appropriately.

3.3.12 Funding recommendation

After the GRP meetings, application scores from panels are used to create ranked lists.

Ranked lists will be used to prepare funding recommendations for NHMRC's Research Committee, Council and CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health.

3.3.13 Notification of outcomes

Feedback will be provided to applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary if their application progressed to the GRP meeting. It will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by peer reviewers.

Attachment A. Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

Fairness

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and honest and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the NHMRC website at: https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-complaints-policy. All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website or via GrantConnect at https://www.grants.gov.au/.
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website[4].

Independence

- The order of merit determined by grant review panels is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.
- Panel Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application before that panel. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC's processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

Appropriateness and balance

- Peer reviewers are selected to meet the program's objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that panels are constituted to ensure an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

Confidentiality

- Peer reviewers are bound to act in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* and the confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act. They must act in confidence

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

and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process.

- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.
- NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

Impartiality

- Peer reviewers must declare all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect their judgement on particular applications.
- Panel members must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, or with grants being reviewed by other panel members, including:
    - research collaborators
    - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
    - employment arrangements
    - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, impair fair and impartial judgement.
- Conflicts of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in decision making on relevant applications.

Quality and Excellence

- NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its peer review processes.
- Any significant change will be developed in consultation with the research community and may involve piloting new processes.
- NHMRC will strive to introduce new technologies that are demonstrated to maximise the benefits of peer review, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process while minimising individual workloads.
- NHMRC will undertake post-program assessment of all its schemes with feedback from the sector.
- NHMRC will provide advice, training and feedback for peer reviewers new to NHMRC peer review.
- Where NHMRC finds peer reviewers to be substandard in their performance, NHMRC may provide such feedback directly to the reviewer or their institution.

Attachment B. Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Conflicts of Interest

The following CoI Situations and Additional Guidance for Work and Professional CoI tables outline matters that may need to be considered when deciding the level of potential conflicts and provide some examples of specific situations where CoIs in the peer review process apply.

The tables are intended to be for guidance only. They are representative of CoI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The tables are provided to assist participants in the peer review process to identify the types of circumstances in which CoIs might arise, but are not intended to be checklists.

Note that CoIs relate to Chief Investigators – **not** Associate Investigators.

CoI situations requiring further clarification

Situation	**Explanations and examples**	**Conflict level[5]**
Application under review	You are a named participant on the application under review.	High
	You have had discussions/input into the study design or research proposal of this application.	High
Collaborations	You have actively collaborated on publications (co-authorship), pending applications, existing NHMRC or other grants.	High
	You have an indirect collaboration e.g. collaborating co-worker, member of a research or discussion group, co-author of a large multi-author paper where involvement was minimal, provided research materials etc. to applicants without financial gain or exchange.	Obtain a ruling from NHMRC
	You are planning or have been approached to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with this applicant(s).	Obtain a ruling from NHMRC
Working relationship	Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.	
Professional relationships and interests	Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.	
Social relationship and/or interests	There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
	You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant's partner or other member of their family.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC

[5] 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.

Situation	Explanations and examples	Conflict level[5]
Teaching or supervisory relationship	For either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, you have taught or supervised the applicant; you co-supervised the applicant; your own research was supervised by the applicant.	High
Financial interest in the application	You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide research materials or similar to the applicant.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
	You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
Other interests or situations	You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier than the last five years).	High

Additional Guidance for Work and Professional CoI

Situation	Explanations and examples		Conflict level*[6]
Working Relationship	You have the same employer or are part of the same organisation	Where a peer reviewer and an applicant work at the same independent Medical Research Institute (e.g. Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, The Garvan Institute of Medical Research etc.) or in the same University/ Hospital Department	High
		Where a peer reviewer or applicant holds a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/ Institute Directors.	High
		Where a peer reviewer and an applicant work for the same institution but at different campuses and do not know each other	Low

[6] 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.

Situation	Explanations and examples		Conflict level*[6]
		Where a peer reviewer and an applicant work in the same faculty but in different schools/departments and do not know each other.	Low
	You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation		High - in most situations due to perceived CoI relating to potential financial benefit from showing favour towards application, and the likelihood that the peer reviewer and applicant know each other.
	You work in the same locality but for a different organisation, i.e. Where a peer reviewer works for a University and an applicant works for an affiliated Medical Research Institute (or vice versa), such as relationships between: • The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI); or • The University of New South Wales and the George Institute for Global Health.	When there is a direct association/collaboration between the peer reviewer and applicant, where the peer reviewer may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.	High
		Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/ collaboration between the peer reviewer and applicant (e.g. researchers located at the University of Melbourne faculty that has no direct association/collaboration with applicant at WEHI).	Low
Professional relationships and interests	You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc.	Where you hold a membership in which you may be perceived to have a vested interest, i.e. pecuniary or other direct interests with the proposed research, e.g. when another board/committee member is associated with the grant application (a member of the CI team or is Faculty/Department Head where the research is to be conducted.)	High

Situation	Explanations and examples		Conflict level*[6]
		You are a member of the same advisory board or committee but otherwise have no links or association that would constitute a High ruling.	Low
	You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's organisation, i.e. where a peer reviewer and an applicant work for different organisations that have active/ongoing collaborations or affiliations, such as affiliations between: • The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI), or • The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health, or • The Schools of Health Sciences at two or more different universities, as part of a research or teaching collaboration.	Where there is a direct link/collaboration between the applicant and peer reviewer, in which the peer reviewer may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.	High
		Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/ collaboration between applicant and peer reviewer (e.g. researcher located at the University of Melbourne and has no direct link/collaboration with individual at WEHI).	Low
	You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies etc.	When you or your institution has an affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have vested interest in this research e.g. a pharmaceutical company that has provided drugs to the applicants for testing.	High
		When you or your institution has an indirect affiliation/ association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research, e.g. you are employed at a large institution in an area distant from the organisation(s) in question.	Low

Attachment C. Concerns Arising During Peer Review about Possible Research Misconduct

This advice is for researchers or others who have become concerned during NHMRC peer review assessment that research misconduct may have occurred. It helps peer reviewers understand the process for raising these concerns.

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) (https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018) aims to promote high quality conduct in research and sets out responsibilities for institutions and staff when research misconduct occurs. You should already be familiar with the Code, which describes the principles and practices for encouraging responsible conduct for researchers and institutions.

Your role in peer review

Peer review is central to NHMRC's strategy of investing in high quality health and medical research, building research capacity and supporting the best research and researchers.

The Code describes peer review as the impartial and independent assessment of research by others in the same or a related field. The Code also notes that peer review may play a role in drawing attention to deviations from the principles of the Code.

What should I do if I come across something that suggests research misconduct while reviewing a grant for NHMRC?

When you are undertaking peer review for NHMRC, you might have concerns, for example, about items in a publications list, or potentially false or misleading statements, diagrams or figures. You could also have concerns about the behaviour of other peer reviewers.

Re-familiarise yourself with the Code

The first step should be to re-read the Code to make sure that you are clear about what you believe is wrong.

The Code provides advice on how to manage research data and materials, how to publish and disseminate research findings (including proper attribution of authorship), how to collaborate across institutions, how to manage conflicts of interest as well as obligations in peer review.

The second step should be to read NHMRC's Grant Guidelines that address issues about incomplete, false or misleading applications.

How should I report my concerns if I believe research misconduct may have occurred?

If you believe research misconduct may have occurred you should raise your concerns with NHMRC. The process depends on the peer review stage the application is at when your concerns arise:

- If GRP meetings have not yet begun, you should contact the relevant secretariat using the funding program or panel-specific email address.
- If GRP meetings are underway, you should raise the issue in a side discussion with the panel Chair, secretariat and/or the director of the relevant funding program.

Where appropriate, the relevant NHMRC director will then refer the matter to NHMRC's Ethics and Integrity section, which will consider the concerns and, where appropriate, contact the research institution involved. It is important to note that NHMRC does not conduct its own investigation into allegations. As per the Code, this is the responsibility of the relevant institution. However, NHMRC will liaise with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation and take any necessary precautionary or consequential actions under the NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding (https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-policy-misconduct).

It is important that you document your concerns clearly and precisely to assist NHMRC in providing specific information to the relevant research institution.

Should I raise these issues in my assessment report or in panel discussion?

As a peer reviewer, your assessment report or contribution to panel discussions should not refer to any concerns related to research integrity. Assessment comments can and should comment on or seek clarification on all aspects of the application without implying concerns with the integrity of the application or applicant. These concerns should be raised through a separate process while the application continues to progress through the peer review process. However, it is not appropriate in assessment reports to suggest that an apparent error or inconsistency is indicative of research misconduct.

The NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding (https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-policy-misconduct) ensures that mechanisms are in place to consider any unresolved research misconduct allegations prior to the release of funding. For example, a condition could be placed on a grant preventing the commencement of funding until after the resolution of the matter, with funding potentially being withheld if research misconduct is proven.

Since allegations are investigated by institutions, NHMRC may need to provide written material on the nature of the concerns. We will not reveal your identity to the institution without your consent and will strive to maintain the anonymity of peer reviewers.

What if I am still not satisfied?

If you do not believe your concerns have been adequately dealt with through this process, you can raise your concerns with the Ethics and Integrity Team by emailing integrity@nhmrc.gov.au who can provide you with further advice.

Attachment D. Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Qualifying applications must address the NHMRC *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as follows:

- Community engagement - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.

- Benefit - the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.

- Sustainability and transferability - the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.

- Building capability - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Panels will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, together with the scheme-specific assessment criteria.

Attachment E. Ideas Grant 2019 Assessment Criteria

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

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

The scheme will provide particular opportunities for early and mid-career researchers. It is expected that the CIA will have the scientific leadership and skills to achieve the proposed project aims. The Ideas Grants scheme is not intended to support research where a clinical trial or cohort study is the primary objective.

Applications for Ideas Grants 2019 are assessed by peers on the extent to which they address the category descriptors at Attachment F:

- Research Quality (35%)
- Innovation and Creativity (25%)
- Significance (20%)
- Feasibility (20%)

Research Quality: The Research Quality criterion is assessed primarily using information provided in the research proposal.

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

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

(Refer to Appendix D of the Ideas Grants 2019 Guidelines for more information on the concept of Innovation and Creativity.)

Significance:
NHMRC defines 'Significance' for the Ideas Grants scheme as the extent to which the outcomes and outputs will result in advancements to the research or health area. Significance in this context does not refer to the prevalence of disease or magnitude of the issue.

Feasibility:
NHMRC defines 'Feasibility' for the Ideas Grants scheme as the appropriateness of the applicant team and their expertise, the resources and access to additional personnel necessary for the project. There is no assessment of an individual CI's or AI's track record in the Ideas Grants scheme.

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

The descriptors are a guide to a "best fit" outcome. The process of consistently referring panel members

to these descriptors is vital to ensuring equity, thoroughness and process consistency both within and across all Peer Review Panels.

Attachment F. Ideas Grant 2019 Category Descriptors

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

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

The category descriptors are a guide to a 'best fit' outcome. Peer reviewers will consistently refer to these category descriptors to ensure thorough, equitable and transparent assessment of applications.

Assessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Contributions
It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions should be considered when assessing research output.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Attachment G. Guidance for Assessing Applications Against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

Panel members should consider the following when assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians. The points below should be explicit throughout the application and not just addressed separately within the Indigenous criteria section.

Community Engagement

- Does the proposal clearly demonstrate a thorough and culturally appropriate level of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or health services prior to submission of the application?
- Is there clear evidence that the level of engagement throughout the project will ensure the feasibility of the proposed study?
- Has the application demonstrated evidence that any of the methods, objectives or key elements of the proposed work have been formed, influenced or defined by the community?
- Were the Indigenous community instrumental in identifying and inviting further research into the health issue and will the research outcomes directly benefit the 'named' communities?
- Is there a history of working together with the 'named' communities e.g. co-development of the grant, involvement in pilot studies or how the 'named' communities will have input/control over the research process and outcomes across the life of the project?

Sustainability and Transferability

- Does the proposal:
  - Provide a convincing argument that the outcomes will have a positive impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which can be maintained after the study has been completed?
  - Have relevance to other Indigenous communities?
  - Clearly plan for and articulate a clear approach to knowledge translation and exchange?
  - Demonstrate that the findings are likely to be taken up in health services and/or policy?
- Will the outcomes from the study make a lasting contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their well-being?

Benefit

- Does the proposal clearly outline the potential health benefits (both intermediate and long term, direct and indirect) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the benefit(s) of the project have been determined or guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities or organisations themselves?

Building Capability

- Does the proposal outline how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or communities will benefit from capability development?
- Does the proposal outline how researchers and individuals/groups associated with the research project will develop capabilities that allow them to have a greater understanding/engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?