



Key Changes - Ideas Grants 2021

This document outlines key changes to the Ideas Grant scheme for 2021 in response to feedback from the sector and experience in previous rounds.

Feedback is sought from peer reviewers at the conclusion of each Ideas Grant round and is received from applicants throughout the round. This feedback contributes to a detailed policy analysis to determine whether the scheme is achieving its objectives and whether any adjustments are required.

For the 2021 round of Ideas Grants, the key changes listed below are intended to clarify NHMRC policy and continue to streamline peer review of applications.

APPLICATION

Application Period

Indicative dates for the 2021 round are at Table 1.

Table 1. Indicative key dates for Ideas Grants 2021.

Activity	Date
Applications open	10 March 2021
Minimum data	17.00 AEST, 7 April 2021
Applications close	17.00 AEST, 5 May 2021
Peer reviewer suitability and conflict of interest declarations	Late May to June 2021
Peer reviewers complete assessments	July - August 2021
Anticipated notification of outcomes under embargo*	December 2021

* Date is indicative and subject to change.

Application Form

Applications will be submitted in Sapphire for the Ideas Grant scheme. Information on how to submit applications in Sapphire will be available in the Guide to Applicants (Appendix E to the Grant Guidelines) when the scheme opens.

Any researcher intending to be a Chief Investigator (CIA – CIJ) or an Associate Investigator on an Ideas Grant application MUST have an active Sapphire account in order to be listed on a grant application. It is recommended that new users register for a Sapphire account in advance of the opening date to update their profile and become familiar with the system. Information on how to do this is available from the [Sapphire landing page](#) and the [Sapphire Internet Page](#).



Use of Gender Neutral Language

NHMRC is committed to gender equality in health and medical research. Fostering gender equality in peer review is a strategic objective, underpinned by [NHMRC's Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2021](#).

To support this objective, NHMRC is strongly encouraging the use of gender-neutral language in applications to all its schemes. This means that, wherever possible and appropriate, applicants should avoid the use of words that reveal their gender or the gender of team members. These words include (but are not limited to) her, him, she, he, Mr, Ms, Mrs and Miss, as well as first names and terms such as 'maternity leave'.

This aims to de-emphasise gender in the assessment of grant applications and reduce the potential impact of unconscious gender bias. (Peer reviewers will also be instructed to use gender-neutral language in their written comments.)

Indigenous Research Excellence

Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria are to be addressed with fields in Sapphire, rather than included in the Grant Proposal PDF document.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

NHMRC recognises the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's health and medical research community. In response, NHMRC has provided additional guidance to applicants to clarify that circumstances associated with the pandemic and other calamities will be considered, where applicable, as part of their application. Applicants are able to describe the impacts of COVID-19 on their research, and if appropriate, can address expected future impacts as part of their risk management strategy within their grant proposal.

Provision of pilot data

For Ideas Grant applications, NHMRC recognises that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many applicants who would have otherwise obtained pilot data to support their grant proposal have not been able to do so. While pilot data are not (and have never been) a requirement for Ideas Grant applications, wording has been included to clarify that, particularly in the context of COVID-19, the presentation of pilot data is not a requirement for Ideas Grant applications.

PEER REVIEW

For peer review of 2021 Ideas Grants:

- NHMRC will seek five independent assessments for each application
- Reviewers will provide scores and written feedback against each assessment criterion
- Grant Review Panel (GRP) meetings will not be held
- Peer reviewer training will be enhanced.

More information on the key changes to 2021 Ideas Grants Peer Review process can be found in the [CEO communique](#) from 25th February 2021.



This communique presents the background and rationale for these changes, in particular:

- Not holding GRP meetings will allow optimal matching of peer reviewers to each application, improving the quality of assessment
- Streamlining the peer review process will reduce the workload on individual reviewers, enable a broader range of reviewers to participate and shorten the time needed for peer review
- These changes will lay the groundwork for new and more flexible approaches to peer review of NHMRC's major schemes over time, such as multiple cycles per year.

Increase in number of independent assessors

In addition to using an “application-centric” approach to matching reviewers to applications for peer review, NHMRC is increasing the number of assessors allocated to each Ideas Grant application. In previous years, applications received up to four independent assessments. In the 2021 round, we are increasing this number so that applications will be allocated to the **five** ‘best fit’ independent peer reviewers based on their conflict of interest and suitability declarations.

Assessors will provide written comments

In previous Ideas Grants funding rounds, assessors have only provided numerical scores, and applicants have not received written feedback. In 2021, each peer reviewer will be asked to provide numerical scores as well as **written comments** against each criterion to justify their scores. Peer reviewer training will be enhanced – NHMRC is currently seeking feedback from 2020 reviewers on preferred mechanisms to provide improved training (e.g. webinar, video).

Peer Review Mentors will be appointed in 2021 to replace the role of Chairs. Mentors will assist with peer reviewer training prior to commencement of assessments and will be available to provide one-on-one mentoring to peer reviewers during the assessment phase. Like the role of previous Chairs, Mentor advice will focus primarily on effective peer review process. They will not discuss matters relating to the scientific (or other) merits of specific applications.

Applicants will be provided with mean scores for each criterion, written comments and overarching benchmarking data (as provided in 2019 and 2020).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This factsheet should be read in conjunction with the following documents, which will be made available when the round opens:

- Ideas Grants 2021 Grant Guidelines
- Ideas Grants 2021 Peer Review Guidelines
- Key Characteristics of Ideas Grant Applications