



NHMRC Funding Rules 2017

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1. Definitions

All terms in the NHMRC Funding Rules and supporting documents have the same meaning as given in the NHMRC Funding Agreement, unless stated otherwise.

2. Introduction

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's largest health and medical research funding body. NHMRC awards grants through several funding schemes to advance health and medical knowledge to improve the health status of all Australians. NHMRC invests in the highest quality research and researchers, as determined through peer review, across the four pillars of health and medical research: biomedical, clinical, public health and health services.

The role and functions of NHMRC are set out in the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (the NHMRC Act). The NHMRC Act provides for NHMRC to pursue activities designed to:

- > raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia
- > foster the development of consistent health standards between the various States and Territories
- > foster medical research and training and public health research and training throughout Australia
- > foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health.

The *NHMRC Corporate Plan* includes NHMRC's strategic directions, the major health issues for this period, how NHMRC will deal with these issues and a strategy for medical research and public health research. NHMRC investment of the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA) is guided by the strategic direction and major health issues outlined in the *NHMRC Corporate Plan*, and incorporates Targeted Calls for Research and funding of other strategic priorities, on Research Committee's advice, via NHMRC's investigator-initiated research funding schemes.

These Funding Rules provide information about the overarching requirements and processes applicable to NHMRC funding schemes, and must be read in conjunction with the following supporting documents:

- > the scheme-specific funding rules, that set out each scheme's objectives, critical dates, assessment criteria, eligibility rules and other scheme-specific information

- › the *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review* and scheme-specific peer review guidelines, that provide additional information about NHMRC's peer review processes
- › the *Advice and Instructions to Applicants* and scheme-specific advice and instructions to applicants, that provides guidance to assist researchers and Administering Institutions with preparing and submitting applications
- › the *Funding Agreement* that sets out the terms and conditions of funding between NHMRC and Administering Institutions.

These Funding Rules and their supporting documents may be amended by NHMRC from time to time. Applicants and grantees should refer to, and must comply with, the latest versions as published on the NHMRC website.

3. Enquiries

For enquiries regarding NHMRC's funding schemes, researchers are directed to the relevant funding scheme's web page on the NHMRC website under Apply for funding, or to the RGMS Training Program for guides on navigating the Research Grants Management System (RGMS).

Researchers requiring further assistance should direct enquiries to their Administering Institution's Research Administration Officer (RAO). RAOs can contact the NHMRC's Research Help Centre (RHC) for further advice.

NHMRC's Research Help Centre

P: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers)

E: help@nhmrc.gov.au.

Please refer to the RHC webpage for opening hours or more information.

Applicants must not make contact about their application with anyone who is directly engaged with its peer review (such as Grant Review Panel (GRP) members or external peer reviewers). Doing so may constitute a breach of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007* (the Code) and result in the application being excluded from consideration.

4. Key changes to the NHMRC Funding Rules

- › Content and formatting requirements have been revised (see Table 1, paragraph 10.3.3).
- › Removal of Research Support Schemes' requirements in relation to funding sources and budgets.

Changes made to each scheme's funding rules are summarised in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

5. Scheme objectives

NHMRC aims to improve the health of Australians by investing in health and medical research. NHMRC does this through several funding programs, the objectives of which vary depending on each scheme's strategic focus.

Refer to the associated scheme-specific funding rules for further details.

6. Assessment criteria

All applications must address, and are assessed against, assessment criteria. Scheme-specific criteria are set out in the scheme-specific funding rules. The following additional information is applicable to all schemes.

6.1 Recognising Applicants' Industry-Relevant Expertise

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that knowledge from health and medical research is translated from the research sector to industry, including through commercialisation (e.g. pharmaceutical or medical devices companies) and improvements to health service delivery (e.g. the Australian, State and Territory governments, and providers of health care).

In order to appropriately recognise the value of industry-relevant expertise, industry skills, experience and achievements are considered in assessing applicants' track records.

This recognises that applicants with experience in sectors other than public sector research (e.g. private industry, government or health care) may have gained highly valuable expertise or produced outputs (e.g. patents or new clinical guidelines) relevant to research translation. This may have limited the applicant's opportunity to produce more traditional research outputs (e.g. peer reviewed publications).

Further details on how applicants' track records are assessed are provided in *section 4.8* of the *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review*, and in the relevant

scheme-specific peer review guidelines.

6.2 Relative to Opportunity

All applications submitted to NHMRC are assessed “relative to opportunity”. This reflects NHMRC’s policy that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant’s track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including consideration as to whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant.

Circumstances considered under “relative to opportunity” include:

- > amount of time spent as an active researcher
- > career disruption (see section 6.2.1. for further details)
- > available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities
- > building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods and subsequent impact on track record and productivity
- > clinical, administrative or teaching workload
- > relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact upon research productivity
- > research outputs and productivity commensurate with time spent employed in other sectors (see section 6.1. for further details) and restrictions on publication associated with time spent working in other sectors (e.g. industry, policy and government)
- > for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including ‘sorry business’
- > the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question.

Further advice is provided in the *Advice and Instructions to Applicants*.

6.2.1 Career Disruption

A career disruption involves a prolonged interruption to an applicant’s capacity to work, due to:

- > pregnancy
- > major illness/injury
- > carer responsibilities.

Interruptions must involve either a continuous absence from work for periods of 28 calendar days or more and/or a long-term partial return to work that has been formalised with the applicant’s employer.

The period of career disruption may be used:

- > to determine an applicant’s eligibility for a scheme
- > to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
- > for consideration by the panel during their deliberations.

Further information on how career disruptions are considered under particular schemes is provided in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules, *Advice and Instructions to Applicants* and *Guide to Peer Review*.

Circumstances considered under section 6.2 Relative to Opportunity are not career disruptions.

6.3 Health Research Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

NHMRC is committed to improving the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and encourages applications that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

As part of NHMRC’s stated commitment to advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC has established certain requirements and processes designed to ensure that research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is of the highest scientific merit and is beneficial and acceptable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Applicants proposing to undertake research which specifically relates to the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, or which includes distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, biological samples or data, should be aware of, and must refer to the following documents in formulating their proposal:

- > *NHMRC Road Map II: A Strategic Framework for Improving the Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People through Research*

- › *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*
- › *Keeping research on track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics*

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 peoples. 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 peoples, 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 peoples, 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 (refer to the scheme-specific funding rules).

7. Eligibility requirements

Applications for NHMRC funding are subject to the general eligibility requirements set out in these Funding Rules.

Additional eligibility requirements are in scheme-specific funding rules.

7.1 General Requirements

Institutions must be an NHMRC approved Administering Institution to be eligible to receive and administer NHMRC funding - refer to the NHMRC website for a list of approved Administering Institutions.

Chief Investigators A (CIAs), Fellows, Scholars and Administering Institutions must ensure applications meet general and scheme-specific eligibility requirements at the time of submission and for the duration of peer review unless otherwise stated. Applications that do not meet these eligibility requirements may be ruled ineligible and may be excluded from further consideration in accordance with Section 10.7 of the NHMRC Funding Rules.

An eligibility ruling may be made by NHMRC at any stage following the close of applications, including during peer review. Where an eligibility ruling is being considered, NHMRC may request further information in order to assess whether the eligibility requirement has been met. Administering Institutions will be notified in writing of ineligible applications and are responsible for advising applicants. Refer to section 11.7 of the NHMRC Funding Rules for the making of complaints in relation to funding outcomes.

7.2 Multiple Applications/Grants

Limits apply to the number of NHMRC grants that a Chief Investigator (CI) may concurrently hold and/or apply for under certain schemes. These include, but are not limited to, Project Grants, Program Grants and some Targeted, Urgent and International Joint calls for research. Refer to each scheme's relevant scheme-specific funding rules to see if restrictions apply. Those holding grants and/or awards from other funding agencies should refer to the relevant funding rules and conditions of the grant or award to determine their eligibility to hold a concurrent NHMRC grant.

Where it appears that an applicant has submitted similar research support proposals and has been successful with more than one application, the applicant is required to provide NHMRC with a written report clearly identifying the difference between the research aims of the two research activities. If NHMRC subsequently does not consider the two research activities to be sufficiently different, the applicant will be required to decline or relinquish one of the grants.

7.3 Excess Salary

Salary support for Specified Personnel must not exceed 100% **across all grants held**. Grants awarded in the current and previous rounds for all

schemes will be considered when determining whether excess salary has been awarded.

Applicants should agree on the management of excess salary with the CIAs/Fellows on all grants if the potential for a Specified Person to be in receipt of excess salary may arise. Applicants, having determined the management strategy in the event of excess salary, should then indicate in their application how excess salary will be managed.

If more than one grant is funded that results in a Specified Personnel being awarded/holding more than 100% salary support, NHMRC will impose a funding condition. The condition may require the CIA/Fellow on the affected grants to agree on, and advise NHMRC, via their RAOs, those grant(s) that will have the salary component of their budgets reduced. Once NHMRC has adjusted the budgets and all conditions have been met, NHMRC will commence payments of the grant.

Refer to scheme-specific advice and instructions to applicants for further information.

7.4 People Support Schemes - Scholar or Fellow specific eligibility requirements

Citizenship/Permanent Residency and Fellowship Location Requirements

At the time of acceptance and for the duration of a grant, the Scholarship or Fellowship holder must be an Australian citizen, a permanent resident of Australia, or a New Zealand citizen with Special Category Visa status. The Scholar or Fellow must also be based in Australia for at least 80% of the funding period. Periods of greater than three months overseas require prior approval from NHMRC unless longer periods are allowed in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

Administering Institutions are responsible for certifying and ensuring that these requirements are met. NHMRC may request further information in relation to these requirements, including evidence of residency and/or citizenship.

7.5 Research Support Schemes

Chief Investigators and other Specified Personnel

CI may undertake research on a part-time basis for all or part of the duration of the grant unless otherwise specified in the scheme-specific funding rules.

The maximum number of CIs allowed on an application varies between schemes - refer to the relevant scheme-specific funding rules for details.

The role and contribution of each CI must be described in the grant application. PhD students may be named as CIs in exceptional circumstances where the PhD student is critical for the successful completion of the proposed research. In these cases, applicants may claim a Personal Support Package (PSP) 1 at 50% for PhD students named as CIs.

CIs are expected to remain active on the Research Activity as outlined in the application for the duration of the grant.

Chief Investigator 'A'

At the time of acceptance and for the duration of a grant, unless otherwise specified in scheme-specific funding rules, the CIA must be an Australian or New Zealand citizen, a permanent resident of Australia or have an appropriate work visa in place. The CIA must also be based in Australia for at least 80% of the funding period.

Salary Support for Chief Investigators

NHMRC Research Support awards are not normally intended to provide salary support for CIs and in some schemes (e.g. Program Grants) salary support for CIs is not offered. However, if applicants are seeking CI salaries, justification on how the proposed budget is directly associated with achieving the outcomes of the research must be provided and will be considered during peer review.

With the exception of Program Grants, Partnership Projects and some Targeted Calls for Research (TCR):

- > CIs, including the CIA, may seek a salary if they are based in Australia for at least 80% of the funding period, as stated above.
- > CIs based overseas are not normally able to draw a salary from a grant unless stated otherwise in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

Requested salaries must be based on Personnel Support Packages (PSPs). Refer to section 8.3 for further information.

NHMRC does not support senior researcher salaries through Research Support schemes. Researchers seeking salaries outside the range of PSP one to five must do so via NHMRC's People Support schemes (e.g. NHMRC Scholarships and Fellowships). Further information about these schemes is available on the NHMRC website.

Consent to be a Chief Investigator

The CIA must confirm in writing with all other CIs that they agree to be named as such on the application and endorse the application. The CIA

must provide written evidence of this to the RAO.

The RAO must not certify and submit the application to NHMRC until the CIA has completed this step and all relevant CI consents and endorsements have been obtained.

Associate Investigators

An Associate Investigator (AI) is defined as an investigator who provides some intellectual and/or practical input into the research and whose participation may warrant inclusion of their name on publications.

Individuals are not able to draw a salary from any NHMRC grants on which they are a named AI.

There is no restriction on who may be named as an AI on an application. However, a maximum number of 10 applies unless otherwise stated in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

The CIA must confirm in writing with all AIs that they agree to be named on the application. Written evidence must be obtained from all AIs and provided to the RAO, stating their agreement to be on the application. AIs are not required to endorse an application prior to submission to NHMRC.

8. Funding

NHMRC funding is provided by the Australian Government and administered in accordance with the Funding Agreement. Funding is provided to the Administering Institution, which is responsible for the administration of the grant.

8.1 Level and Duration of Funding

NHMRC's Research Committee (RC) annually reviews and recommends an indicative budget to be awarded across Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA) funding schemes. Funding recommendations for individual schemes are considered by RC on completion of grant review processes throughout the year.

Limits on the level and duration of funding for individual grants are outlined in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules. Duration of five years is common for many NHMRC funding schemes, to allow for greater career certainty and in recognition that high quality research is becoming increasingly complex to perform. Where no fixed level or duration is specified, the requested funding and duration must be justified in the application.

For Research Support schemes, GRPs generally recommend a budget and duration for each application based on the budgets requested by applicants, the requirements of each proposal as assessed by the GRPs, their knowledge of the costs associated with the research, any limits specified in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules, and value for money considerations.

Budgets may be reduced where the GRP considers that all aims and objectives can be achieved with the recommended funds. A reduced budget does not reduce the scope of the proposed research activity.

Budgets may also, or alternatively, be assessed by senior NHMRC scientists with a research background, such as where peer review is conducted by a funding partner. In all cases, 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.

For People Support schemes, funding level and duration are fixed according to the type of award, as set out in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

8.2 Duplicate Funding

NHMRC may compare the research proposed in grant applications with grants previously funded, currently funded, and funded by other agencies (e.g. Australian Research Council (ARC), and published research (refer to section 7.2.). NHMRC will not fund research that it considers duplicates research previously or currently being undertaken.

As stated in the *NHMRC's Privacy Policy*, NHMRC may disclose applicants' personal information to overseas entities, Australian, State/Territory or local government agencies, organisations or individuals where necessary to assess an application or to administer a grant. This includes liaising with other funding agencies (such as the ARC) to discuss any overlap between applications in order to avoid duplication of funding.

8.3 Use of Funds

8.3.1 Budget Items for People Support Schemes

Applicants do not need to complete a budget because salary contributions for Fellows and Scholars are provided at fixed rates. NHMRC funding

under Fellowships and Scholarships may only be expended for the purposes provided for in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules.

8.3.2 Budget Items for Research Support Schemes

NHMRC funding under Research Support Schemes may only be expended on Direct Research Costs (DRCs) as described in the *NHMRC Direct Research Costs Guidelines*. For further information see the Direct Research Costs page on the NHMRC website.

Applicants must provide the total value of requested items on a yearly basis and justify all budget items, paying particular attention to any requests which may be atypical for the particular field of research. Where applicable, applicants should also note and must comply with the following additional information and requirements:

- > Salaries:
 - > Salary contributions for research staff are provided as Personnel Support Packages (PSPs).
 - > Only eligible personnel may apply for a PSP. Refer to section 7 for further details.
 - > The level of PSP requested in an application must match the roles and responsibilities of the position, not the expertise of a specific person whom the CIs intend to appoint to the position.
 - > Annual indexation may be applied to PSPs, based on the Australian Government Wage Cost Index (WCI).
 - > Further information about PSP amounts can be found on the Budget Mechanisms for NHMRC Research Funding page of the NHMRC website under Apply for funding.
- > Collection, processing, storage and distribution 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).
 - > Given the significant expansion in biobank activities in Australia in the last decade, any new 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.
- > Using the services of other research facilities:
 - > Researchers should consult with research facilities to ensure that the services for which they are seeking DRC funding can be provided and that the research budgets reflect these charges. Letters from research facilities confirming their collaboration must be included with the application.
- > Items of equipment unique to the project and essential for the project to proceed:
 - > Applicants must clearly outline the total value of all items of equipment for each year, why the equipment is required for the proposed research and why the equipment cannot be provided by the institution.
 - > For each item of equipment requested, a written quotation must be received and held with the RAO of the Administering Institution, to be available to NHMRC on request.
 - > The Administering Institution must be prepared to meet all service and repair costs in relation to equipment funded.
 - > 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 research field. For example: a computer which is dedicated to data collection from a mass spectrometer, or used for the manipulation of extensively large datasets (i.e. requiring special hardware).
 - > Individual items of equipment costing less than \$10,000 must be requested as DRCs.
 - > Funding is not available for equipment totalling more than \$80,000.
 - > Annual indexation is applied to equipment, based on the Wage Cost Index (WCI).

GRPs will review proposed budgets and may recommend budgets less than those requested, as set out in section 8.1.

8.4 Tax Implications

All amounts referred to in the *NHMRC Funding Rules* and relevant scheme-specific funding rules are exclusive of GST, unless stated otherwise.

Administering Institutions are responsible for all financial and taxation implications associated with receiving funds.

9. Researcher responsibilities and considerations

9.1 Responsible Conduct of Research

NHMRC expects the highest levels of research conduct and integrity to be observed in the research that it funds. Institutions that administer grants, as well as the Specified Personnel, are bound by the conditions of the *Funding Agreement*. NHMRC funded research must be conducted in accordance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code).

9.2 Incomplete, False or Misleading Information

All information submitted to NHMRC must be complete, current and accurate at the time of submission.

Administering Institutions are required to notify NHMRC of research misconduct matters, in accordance with the Funding Agreement and the *NHMRC Policy on Misconduct related to NHMRC Funding*.

Under section 136.1 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995, it is an offence to provide false or misleading information to a Commonwealth body in an application for a benefit.

Examples of false or misleading information in an application include, but are not limited to:

- > providing a dishonest statement regarding time commitments to the research for which support is being sought
- > providing incomplete or inaccurate facts regarding other sources of funding
- > providing fictitious track records
- > falsifying claims in publication records (such as describing a paper as accepted for publication when it has only been submitted).

If NHMRC believes that omissions or inclusion of misleading information are intentional, it may refer the matter for appropriate investigation and take action under these Funding Rules and the Funding Agreement or in accordance with the *NHMRC Policy on Misconduct related to NHMRC Funding*.

9.3 Dissemination of Scientific Results (Open Access, Data Sharing and Intellectual Property)

The Australian Government makes a major investment in research to improve the wellbeing of our society. To maximise the benefits flowing from research, and to allow access by other researchers and the wider community, publications resulting from research activities must be disseminated as broadly as possible. NHMRC acknowledges that researchers take into account a wide range of factors in determining the best avenues for dissemination of findings and/or publications arising from their research.

Funding recipients must ensure that they comply with NHMRC policy on the dissemination of research findings, which is available on the NHMRC website under Dissemination of Research Findings.

9.4 Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research

The *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research* (the Statement) has been developed because many consumers and researchers recognise the contribution that consumers can make to health and medical research. The Consumers Health Forum of Australia Ltd (CHF) and NHMRC worked in partnership with consumers and researchers to develop the Statement. Researchers are encouraged to consider the benefits of actively engaging consumers in their proposed research, noting that section 1.13 of the Code states 'Appropriate consumer involvement in research should be encouraged and facilitated by research institutions and researchers'.

9.5 Privacy and disclosure of Personal information

NHMRC is committed to protecting applicants' and grantees' privacy in compliance with the *Privacy Act 1988* (Privacy Act). The Australian Privacy Principles set out how Australian Government agencies should collect, use, store and disclose personal information and how individuals can access records containing their personal information.

For some funding schemes, NHMRC may disclose your personal information to an overseas-based co-funding organisation. NHMRC may also appoint peer reviewers from overseas countries, where there is a need, and in accordance with the Privacy Act and the *NHMRC's Privacy Policy*. RGMS will prompt you with a notice that seeks your consent to overseas disclosures.

9.6 Confidentiality

Section 80 of the NHMRC Act makes it an offence for NHMRC Officers (which includes members of NHMRC Council and committees) to disclose confidential commercial information acquired in the course of their duties and relating to matters under consideration by NHMRC,

unless the disclosure is made in the performance of duties under the NHMRC Act.

NHMRC will not be taken to have breached its obligations to the extent that it discloses confidential commercial information for a purpose directly related to the enforcement or investigation of a possible breach of any Commonwealth, State, Territory or local law.

Information which may properly be regarded as confidential commercial information should be identified as such by applicants.

9.7 Freedom of Information

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.

Researchers should familiarise themselves with NHMRC's Freedom of Information procedures before submitting an application.

10. Submitting an application

10.1 Opening and Closing Dates

Application opening and closing dates vary between NHMRC funding schemes and may include interim deadlines (e.g. minimum data submission deadlines). Indicative dates are generally advertised well in advance on the NHMRC website under NHMRC Funding Calendar. Confirmed dates and associated deadlines are published in scheme-specific funding rules once the application period opens.

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure they are aware of all relevant dates (including any NHMRC interim deadlines and internal submission dates imposed by institutions), closing times, whether daylight saving applies and any time zone differences. Applications will not be accepted if:

- > they are submitted after the specified closing date and time
- > they fail to meet any interim deadlines.

Any changes to dates will be notified via the RAO of Administering Institutions and published in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules and on the NHMRC website.

Once submitted to NHMRC as outlined in section 10.4, the application is considered final and no changes may be made (see section 10.6 of the *NHMRC Funding Rules*).

10.2 Submission Method

Applications must be submitted electronically using NHMRC's online Research Grants Management System (RGMS) unless otherwise advised by NHMRC.

Electronic submission requires Administering Institutions and all Specified Personnel on an application to register for an RGMS account. Applicants who are not registered in RGMS can submit a new user request via the RGMS login page.

Refer to the RGMS Training Program for detailed user instructions, or contact your RAO or the NHMRC Research Help Centre for further assistance.

10.3 Content and Format Requirements

Applicants must complete and submit the following information in RGMS:

- > all mandatory sections of the RGMS Profile
- > all sections of the RGMS Curriculum Vitae (CV) required by the relevant scheme
- > all parts of the application form
- > any other supporting documents required by the relevant scheme (e.g. grant proposal, referee reports, letters of support from policy/practice/funding partners, etc).

The application should contain all information necessary for assessment without the need for further written or oral explanation or reference to additional documentation. All details included must be current at the time of submission, as this information is relied on during assessment.

Applicants must not include in any part of their application:

- > links to external websites, apart from references to journal articles, guidelines, government reports, datasets and other outputs that are only available online. Where links are included, provide the URL in full (e.g. the NHMRC website <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au>).

> publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors, and the previous Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List, consistent with the recommendations from the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment.

More information on this can be found in the *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review*.

Applications must comply with all content and formatting requirements. Incomplete or non-compliant applications may be excluded from consideration.

Additional requirements and guidance in relation to each component of the application are provided below and in the Advice and Instructions to Applicants.

10.3.1 Profile and CV

Profile and CV information must be provided for all Specified Personnel named on an application. It is the responsibility of all Specified Personnel to enter and maintain the information in their RGMS Profile and CV. This information is used to contact applicants, assess applications and identify peer reviewers. The CV is also used to capture grant outcomes in the form of publications.

All Specified Personnel must have entered their Profile and CV information in RGMS before CIA, Scholar or Fellow certification. An earlier deadline may apply to the entry of some Profile and CV data (e.g. if a minimum data date applies). This will be stated in the relevant scheme-specific funding rules where this is the case.

Mandatory Profile information is indicated by a red asterisk in RGMS.

CV requirements vary between schemes and are specified in the *Advice and Instructions to Applicants*.

10.3.2 Application Form

The CIA, Scholar or Fellow must complete all parts of the application form, in English, prior to submission. An earlier minimum data date may apply to the completion of some parts of the application form. Scheme-specific funding rules will identify if this applies.

Application requirements vary between schemes. Refer to the *Advice and Instructions to Applicants* for further details.

10.3.3 Grant Proposal

In addition to the application form, a written Grant Proposal must be submitted in English. Applications must be submitted in a PDF file, using the NHMRC's Grant Proposal template available on each scheme's respective webpage. Applicants must use this template to complete their Grant Proposal. The Grant Proposal must then be uploaded into RGMS.

Details to be addressed in the Grant Proposal and associated page limits are set out in the scheme-specific advice and instructions to applicants. Applicants must note that assessors will, as part of their assessment, consider the reproducibility and applicability of the proposed research and research design. Within the experimental design of the proposal, applicants should include sufficient information to demonstrate that robust and unbiased results will be produced. For further detail, refer to the Grant Proposal table in the scheme-specific advice and instructions to applicants.

Naming and formatting requirements for the Grant Proposal are listed in the table below.

Conformance with page limits and formatting requirements is strictly enforced. Applications that fail to comply with these requirements may be excluded from consideration.

Table 1: Formatting requirements[1]

Component	Requirements
File format	The Grant Proposal must be saved and uploaded as a Portable Document Format (PDF) file
File size	The PDF file MUST NOT exceed 2Mb in size
File name	The PDF file must be named using the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > APP ID_Applicant's Surname_Document Type/Name.pdf > e.g. APP1234567_Smith_Grant Proposal.pdf
Page size	A4
Page limits	Page limits vary between schemes and parts of the document. Refer to the relevant scheme-specific advice and instructions to applicants for applicable page limits
Header	Application ID and Applicant surname must be included in the header. Document title (e.g. Grant Proposal – 2014 Second Call Partnership Projects) must be included header.
Footer	Page number must be included in the footer.
Font	NHMRC recommends a minimum of 12 point Times New Roman font. Applicants must ensure the font is readable.
Line spacing	Single
Language	English

[1] If the assessor cannot read the application due to inconsistency with any of the above formatting requirements, or a combination of any of them, the assessor is not compelled to consider the improperly completed section in their assessment or complete the assessment of the application, on the grounds that the application does not comply with the formatting requirements. Where an assessor cannot complete an assessment because the formatting renders the grant proposal unreadable and therefore does not submit an assessment, such applications will not be excused from the NFFC process because they do not meet the minimum assessments requirement as per the NFFC business rules.

10.4 Certification and Submission

Once complete, applications must be electronically certified and then submitted to NHMRC through the RAO of an NHMRC approved Administering Institution.

Certification is required firstly by the CIA, Fellow or Scholar and then by the Administering Institution.

10.4.1 CIA, Fellow or Scholar Certification

The CIA, Fellow or Scholar must also provide the RAO with evidence that the application is complete and that all CIs have agreed to it (i.e. through written evidence such as email). Such written evidence should be retained by the Administering Institution and must be provided to the NHMRC on request.

The following assurances, acknowledgements and undertakings are required of the CIA, Fellow or Scholar prior to submitting an application:

- > All required information has been provided and is complete, current and correct, and all eligibility and other application requirements have been met.
- > All personnel contributing to the Research Activity have familiarised themselves with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, the *National Statement of the Ethical Conduct of Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes* and other relevant NHMRC policies concerning the conduct of research, and agree to conduct themselves in accordance with those policies.
- > All Specified Personnel have provided written agreement to be named on the application, to participate in the manner described in the application and to the use of their personal information as described in the *NHMRC Privacy Policy*.
- > All Chief Investigators have provided written agreement for the final application to be certified.
- > The application may be excluded from consideration if found to be in breach of any requirements in accordance with section 10.7 of the NHMRC Funding Rules.

And if funded,

- › the research will be carried out in strict accordance with the conditions governing NHMRC grants at the time of award
- › the research may be used for internal NHMRC quality evaluations/reviews.

10.4.2 Administering Institution Certification

The following assurances, acknowledgements and undertakings are required of the Administering Institution prior to submitting an application:

- › Reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the application is complete and correct and complies with all eligibility and other application requirements detailed in the relevant Funding Rules and Advice and Instructions to Applicants.
- › Where the CIA, Fellow or Scholar is not an Australian citizen or permanent resident, they will have the requisite work visa in place at the time of accepting the successful grant and will remain in Australia for at least 80% of the funding period.
- › The appropriate facilities and salary support will be available for the funding period
- › Approval of the Research Activity by relevant institutional committees and approval bodies, particularly in relation to ethics and biosafety, will be sought and obtained prior to the commencement of the research, or the parts of the research that require their approval
- › Arrangements for the management of the grant have been agreed between all institutions associated with the application
- › The application is being submitted with the full authority of, and on behalf of, the Administering Institution, noting that under section 136.1 of the *Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995*, it is an offence to provide false or misleading information to a Commonwealth body in an application for a benefit. This includes submission of an application by those not authorised by the Institution to submit applications for funding to NHMRC.
- › Written evidence of consent has been obtained from all CIs and AIs and provided to the RAO.

Administering Institutions must ensure that the RAO role is authorised to certify and submit applications.

Once an application has been submitted and the scheme application period has closed, the application is considered final and no changes may be made.

10.5 Retracted Publications

If a publication relevant to an application is retracted after the application has been submitted, the applicant must promptly notify their RAO. The RAO must advise NHMRC at the earliest opportunity of the retraction by email (help@nhmrc.gov.au) with an appropriate explanation regarding the retraction.

In addition, where the publication forms part of the applicant's track record, the applicant must immediately record that information in their Profile & CV in RGMS.

If an application is largely dependent on the results of a retracted publication, the applicant should also consider withdrawing the application. If, under these circumstances, an applicant chooses not to withdraw the application, they should make their reasons clear by immediately advising the NHMRC in writing to the Research Help Centre at help@nhmrc.gov.au.

10.6 Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be withdrawn at any time by written notice from the Administering Institution's RAO to NHMRC.

An application may be 'marked for deletion' by the applicant in RGMS before the close of the round. This authorises the NHMRC to delete the application once the round has closed. The application will not be deleted while the funding round remains open for application submission.

10.7 Exclusion of Applications

An application may be excluded from further consideration if:

- › it contravenes an eligibility rule or other requirement as set out in the NHMRC Funding Rules, scheme-specific funding rules or *Advice and Instructions to Applicants*
- › it, or persons named on the application, contravene an applicable law or code
- › it is inconsistent with the objectives of the NHMRC Act and/or the purposes of the MREA (refer to sections 3 and 51 of the *NHMRC Act*)
- › persons named on the application are the subject of a decision by the Chief Executive Officer or Delegate that any application they make to NHMRC, for specified funding schemes, will be excluded from consideration for a period of time, whether or not they meet the eligibility requirements. Such decisions will generally reflect action taken by NHMRC in response to research misconduct allegations or findings, or a Probity Event. See the *NHMRC Policy on Misconduct related to NHMRC Funding*.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- › The application is not certified and submitted via RGMS through the RAO of an NHMRC approved Administering Institution by the advertised closing date and time.
- › The proposed research duplicates research previously or currently being undertaken.
- › The application fails to accurately declare the source, duration and level of funding already held for research in the particular area of the application.
- › The application includes any incomplete, false or misleading information.
- › The CEO or delegate has made a decision under the relevant NHMRC policy to exclude the applicant from consideration in response to research misconduct allegations or findings or a Probity Event.

This is to ensure a level playing field for all applicants and to uphold the integrity of NHMRC funded research. Such exclusion may take place at any time following CIA, Fellow, Scholar and Administering Institution certification.

If a decision to exclude an application from further consideration is made, NHMRC will provide its decision and the reason(s) for the decision to the Administering Institution's RAO in writing. The Administering Institution's RAO is responsible for advising applicants of the decision in writing. Decisions to exclude an application may be reviewable by the Commissioner of Complaints (refer to the NHMRC website for further information on the Commissioner of Complaints).

11. Assessment process

The assessment of applications against assessment criteria (refer to section 6) may be undertaken jointly with partners and/or with input from independent assessors, depending on the funding scheme.

An overview of the assessment process is provided in the following sections. Refer to the relevant scheme-specific funding rules and peer review guidelines for further detail.

11.1 Initial Processing of Applications

NHMRC staff check that applications are eligible according to both the general and relevant scheme-specific eligibility rules. Conformance with other application requirements is also checked during the course of peer review. If an application is found to be ineligible or in breach of an application requirement, NHMRC will advise the Administering Institution's RAO in writing and the application will be excluded from further consideration (see section 10.7 of the *NHMRC Funding Rules*).

11.2 Peer Review and Value for Commonwealth Money

High quality, rigorous peer review is a fundamental tenet of NHMRC's assessment process. NHMRC peer review adheres to NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review and is conducted in accordance with the *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review*.

All applications are assessed for scientific merit against assessment criteria using robust, impartial and independent peer review processes. In addition, for Research Support schemes, proposed budgets are reviewed based on the requirements of each application and the peer reviewers' (or senior NHMRC scientists') knowledge of the associated costs.

These processes ensure that only the highest quality, most relevant and most competitive (effective, efficient and economical) research is recommended for funding and, together with conditions for ethical review, maximise value for Commonwealth money.

Steps in the peer review process vary between schemes. These are described in detail in each scheme's *Peer Review Guidelines*.

11.3 Disclosures and Conflicts of Interests

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently and transparently in accordance with section 42A of the *NHMRC Act* and sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*.

NHMRC has procedures in place for managing the interests of peer reviewers, members of NHMRC committees and NHMRC staff. These can be found in *NHMRC Declaration of Interests and Conflict of Interest Policy*. Further information on what constitutes an interest including Conflicts of Interests (COIs) and how NHMRC manages these can be found in the *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review*.

11.4 Decision-Making

Once applications have been peer-reviewed, NHMRC seeks advice from its Research Committee and Council on funding recommendations for MREA funding schemes. Neither Council nor Research Committee changes the category or scores given to individual grants by the GRPs, nor are they given information that would enable identification of individual applications. Research Committee determines the total number and value of applications that it considers appropriate to recommend for funding, taking into consideration the available budget and strategic priorities.

Council then considers Research Committee's recommendations and advises the NHMRC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

In accordance with paragraph 7(1)(c) of the NHMRC Act, the CEO then makes recommendations on expenditure from the MREA to the Minister with portfolio responsibility for NHMRC.

11.5 Objections to Assessor Reports

Applicants may object to assessor comments and seek an NHMRC ruling. These objections will be assessed relative to the guidance provided in section 5.1 of the Guide to NHMRC Peer Review.

Applicants should state their objection/s in writing to the NHMRC through the Administering Institution's RAO. Objections must be received within five calendar days of comments being issued and should state how the comments do not meet NHMRC standards set out in section 6.1 of the guide to NHMRC Peer Review. Unless NHMRC advises otherwise, applicants should continue with the preparation of a rebuttal.

Objections should be directed to the scheme director via an email to the Research Help Centre at help@nhmrc.gov.au.

NHMRC will provide a written response to all objections.

Following receipt of the NHMRC scheme director's response, applicants may choose to seek a further review by the Complaints Team (see section 11.7 of these *Funding Rules*).

11.6 Notification of Outcomes

NHMRC will advise applicants and their nominated Administering Institution's RAO of the outcome of the application as early as possible. This will typically follow the announcement of funding by the portfolio Minister or his/her representative, but may be sooner if an application has been assessed as uncompetitive or excluded for other reasons (see section 10.7 of these *Funding Rules*).

NHMRC may advise applicants of the outcomes under embargo.

Feedback will generally be provided to applicants, except where peer review is conducted by a funding partner or the application is deemed Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) or non-competitive. This feedback will typically comprise an overall score for the application and depending on the nature of the funding scheme, may also include a score against each assessment criterion and/or additional report. Following the announcement of outcomes, applicants will receive their feedback report attached to their outcome letter.

CIAs, Fellows and Scholars whose applications are approved, will have access to a letter of offer through RGMS. Administering Institutions responsible for administering approved applications will also have access to the letter of offer. In addition, the Administering Institution will have access, through RGMS, to the Schedule to the Funding Agreement. The Administering Institution is responsible for accepting the Schedule through the online acceptance process within RGMS.

Once outcomes are publicly announced, NHMRC will publish the following information on its website for all awarded grants, including Fellowships:

- > Application identity number (ID)
- > Chief Investigator (CI) name/s
- > Administering Institution
- > Scientific title
- > Broad Research Area
- > Funding partners (if relevant)
- > Total funding awarded and duration.

NHMRC may publish this information in a manner that allows it to be searched and viewed in a variety of ways, including by CI name, state, institution and/or application ID.

The plain English summary may also be published.

The CEO or delegate may withdraw or vary an offer of a grant if they consider that it is reasonably necessary to protect Commonwealth revenue. See *NHMRC Policy on Misconduct* related to *NHMRC Funding*, as amended from time to time.

11.7 Complaints in Relation to Funding Outcomes

Applicants or Grantees seeking to lodge a formal complaint about an NHMRC process related to funding should do so via the Administering Institution's RAO, in writing, within 28 days of the relevant NHMRC decision or action.

Applicants who wish to object to assessor comments should refer to section 11.5 of the NHMRC Funding Rules.

Each complaint should be directed to the Complaints Team at: complaints@nhmrc.gov.au.

The NHMRC will provide a written response to all complaints.

Refer to NHMRC Complaints Policy and the Commissioner of Complaints webpage for further information.

12. Grant administration

12.1 Information required from Awardees

Awardees may be required to supply additional information about their Research Activity before payments commence. This will be stated in each scheme's relevant scheme-specific funding rules and letter of offer.

12.2 Approvals and Licences

Where relevant, particularly in relation to ethics and biosafety, NHMRC-funded Research Activities must be referred for approval to the relevant institutional committees and approval bodies. This applies to both Research Support and People Support schemes.

For further information see the Administering Grants section of the NHMRC website.

12.3 NHMRC Funding Agreement

All grants are offered in accordance with the Funding Agreement (with the conditions specified in Schedules), which is an agreement between NHMRC and the Administering Institution. In accepting the Schedules, the Administering Institution is agreeing to the conditions contained in the Funding Agreement and the Schedule.

Details of the Funding Agreement can be found on the NHMRC website under Administering Grants. A grant will not commence, nor grant funds be paid, until:

- > the Funding Agreement between NHMRC and the Administering Institution is in place
- > the appropriate Schedule to the Funding Agreement is accepted by the Responsible Officer, or their delegate, and is accepted and executed by NHMRC.

12.4 Payments

Payments will commence once any outstanding obligations (e.g. conditions, eligibility rules or data requirements specified in the Schedule to the Funding Agreement, relevant funding rules or letter of offer) have been met by the CI/Fellow and the Administering Institution.

12.5 Variations

Grant variations cannot be used as a means to meet NHMRC eligibility requirements, unless allowed for in the scheme-specific funding rules.

For information on grant variation eligibility requirements, see the scheme-specific funding rules and *NHMRC's Variations Policy*.

12.6 Suspensions of Award

NHMRC funding may be suspended for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to requests made by the CIA/Fellow.

The CEO or delegate may suspend funding when it is reasonable to consider there has been a failure to comply with a Policy or Guideline, on the basis of a Probity Event, or an investigation of alleged research misconduct, as set out in the Funding Agreement.

Refer to the relevant scheme-specific funding rules for information regarding particular schemes.

12.7 Reporting

Where an institution fails to submit reports (financial or otherwise) as required, NHMRC may take action under the provisions of the Funding Agreement. Failure to report within timeframes may affect eligibility to receive future funding.

12.7.1 Financial Reports

Annual financial reports are required in a form prescribed by NHMRC. At the completion of the grant, a financial acquittal is also required. Refer to the NHMRC website for details of format and timing.

12.7.2 Non-Financial Reports

The Funding Agreement requires the Specified Person (CIA for Research Support schemes or Fellow) to prepare reports for each Research Activity. It is a condition of funding that outstanding obligations from previous NHMRC grants, including submission of a Final Report, have been met prior to time of award. Scientific reporting requirements can be found on the NHMRC website under Administering Grants. Additional obligations may apply to some schemes – refer to the relevant scheme-specific funding rules for details.

NHMRC has designated the Research Achievements Summary in the Final Report as information that NHMRC may publicly release. Use of this information may include publication on the NHMRC website, publicity (including release to the media), and the promotion of research achievements.

All information provided to NHMRC in reports may be used for internal reporting and reporting to government. This information may also be used by NHMRC when reviewing or evaluating funded research projects, funding schemes, or designing future schemes.

12.8 Evaluation

NHMRC undertakes periodic evaluations of the performance and administration of its funding schemes to determine strengths and to identify where improvements can be made.

The NHMRC also facilitates public access to NHMRC-funded research outcomes through its policy on the dissemination of research findings (see section 9.3). This policy ensures that peer-reviewed journal publications arising from NHMRC grants, with the exception of scholarships, are freely available to the public, including for the purpose of evaluation.

12.8.1 NHMRC National Institute for Dementia Research

Grantees undertaking research related to dementia must contribute their expertise to the NHMRC National Institute for Dementia Research (NNIDR), which is responsible for strategically expanding, coordinating and translating the national dementia research effort. The NNIDR will draw on the expertise of researchers and other dementia stakeholders via a membership model to drive Australia's dementia research and translation effort, and work together to maximise the impact of research.

Additional reporting on NHMRC funded dementia research will also be sought from Administering Institutions as required to inform the Institute's work plan and subsequent research activities.

Further information on the Institute and related developments can be found on the NHMRC website.

13. Applicable laws and obligations

For a list of Applicable Laws and Obligations, see the NHMRC website.

14. Resources

14.1 NHMRC Resources

- > *A Guide to NHMRC Peer Review 2017*
- > *NHMRC Guideline Development and Conflicts of Interest*
- > *About the NHMRC*
- > *Access to the Research Grants Management System (RGMS)*
- > *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007*
- > *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 8th edition 2013*
- > *Grantee Variations Policy*
- > *Keeping research on track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics*
- > *NHMRC Administering Institutions policy*
- > *NHMRC Advice and Instructions to Applicants 2017*
- > *NHMRC's Freedom of Information Policy*
- > *NHMRC Funding Agreement*
- > *Commissioner of Complaints*
- > *NHMRC Policy on Misconduct related to NHMRC Funding*

- > *NHMRC Policy on the Dissemination of Research Findings*
- > *NHMRC's Privacy Policy*
- > *NHMRC Corporate Plan*
- > *Principles-based Direct Research Cost Guidelines*
- > *The NHMRC Road Map II: A Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research*
- > *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*

14.2 Legislation

- > *Criminal Code Act 1995*
- > *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- > *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act 2013)*
- > *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992 (NHMRC Act)*
- > *Privacy Act 1988*
- > *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002 (PHCR Act)*
- > *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002 (RIHE Act)*

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