Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme 2021 Peer Review Guidelines

Opening date:	14 April 2021
Closing date and time:	17:00 ACT local time on 9 June 2021
Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
RGMS assistance and enquiries:	NHMRC Research Help Centre Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au Note: NHMRC's Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within two working days. This timeframe may be delayed during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.
Postgraduate Scholarship enquiries:	Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: scholarships@nhmrc.gov.au

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, guidelines and policies. 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 Postgraduate Scholarship scheme peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation, guidelines and policies
- how to disclose interests and manage conflicts, and
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

NHMRC will publicly notify the sector of any change in peer review process via its communications, such as through NHMRC's website and newsletters.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- Postgraduate Scholarships 2021 Grant Guidelines, available on GrantConnect, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.
- *Policy on the Disclosure of Interests requirements for prospective and appointed NHMRC committee members* (Section 39 Committees). This Policy outlines peer reviewers' responsibilities in order to ensure all disclosures of interests are addressed in a rigorous and transparent way throughout the period of a peer reviewer's participation in NHMRC Committees.

2 KEY CHANGES

NHMRC recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's health and medical research community and has updated assessment processes to reflect these impacts.

Peer reviewers must follow these updated processes:

- In track record assessment, peer reviewers must consider COVID-19 related circumstances, as outlined by applicants, as part of career disruptions or other relative to opportunity considerations under the provisions of NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy.

- Peer reviewers should note that applicants have been advised that they may include information on any potential significant and long term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their proposed research, and proposals for managing such risks, as part of their research risk management plan within the grant proposal.

- Peer reviewers are not to let the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proposed research affect the assessment of the research proposal of an application (e.g. the feasibility of accessing certain patient or population groups with social distancing restrictions in place).

- Peer reviewers must note that changes to the research proposal of a funded application, necessitated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. the commencement of a project needs to be delayed by six months until COVID-19 restrictions are eased) will be considered through NHMRC's Postaward management and grant variations processes. Such considerations do not form part of the peer review assessment of the proposal, particularly given that the long term impacts of the pandemic are still unknown.

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the Postgraduate Scholarships 2021 grant opportunity:

- Revised NHMRC Relative to Opportunity policy (Appendix G) – – The Policy has been revised by categorising and updating reference to Relative to Opportunity circumstances typically considered during peer review, including disability, illness and unemployment (noting that applicants can nominate any circumstance impacting productivity).
- The role of the panel Chair has been removed from the peer review process in the 2021 funding round of the Postgraduate Scholarships scheme, since assessment confirmation teleconferences are no longer part of the peer review process for this scheme.

3 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 peer reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

3.1 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, in accordance with the obligations in the Funding Agreement.
- **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 disclosures of interest.
- **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 Appendix A.

3.2 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

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 is supported by additional supplementary guidance, including *Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

3.3 Disclosures of Interest

3.3.1 What is an interest?

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (made under the subsection 29(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2013*

(PGPA Act)).

In particular, under section 29 of the PGPA Act, “an official of a Commonwealth entity who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest”. This obligation is ongoing and not limited to a particular point in time.

For the purposes of this document, the terms “material personal interest” and “interest” are regarded as interchangeable and whilst the term “interest/s” has been used for ease of reading, this policy includes guidance on each.

3.3.2 What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)?

A CoI exists when there is a divergence between professional responsibilities (as a peer reviewer) and personal interests. Such conflicts have the potential to lead to biased advice affecting objectivity and impartiality. By managing any conflict, NHMRC maintains the integrity of its processes in the assessment of scientific and technical merit of the application.

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

- Involvement with the application under review
- Working relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Social relationships or associations
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Financial relationships or interests
- Other relevant interests or relationships

For further information, peer reviewers should consult the NHMRC *Policy on the Disclosure of Interests Requirements for Prospective and Appointed NHMRC Committee Members* (Section 39 Committees).

Researchers frequently have a CoI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under 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 and guidance is provided for peer reviewers at Appendix B.

3.3.3 Disclosure of Interests in the Peer Review Process

Peer reviewers must identify and disclose interests they may have with any of the Chief Investigators (CIs) and Associate Investigators (AIs) on applications they will be reviewing. After appointment as a peer reviewer, but before assessing any applications, peer reviewers are required to disclose their interests in writing. While interests must be disclosed at the beginning of the peer review process, new or previously unrecognised interests must be disclosed at any stage of the peer review process. Declarations must include details that substantiate when collaborations occurred (i.e. month and year). NHMRC will use these details to verify and determine the level of conflict. Any peer reviewer who has an interest that is determined by NHMRC to be a ‘high’ CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of the Chair or NHMRC.

3.3.4 Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer’s appointment under section 44B of the NHMRC Act (section 44B also covers failure to comply with section 29 of the PGPA Act).

It is important for peer reviewers to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process. Accordingly, peer reviewers are encouraged to consult the secretariat if they are uncertain about any disclosure of interest matter.

3.4 Freedom of Information (FoI)

NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to

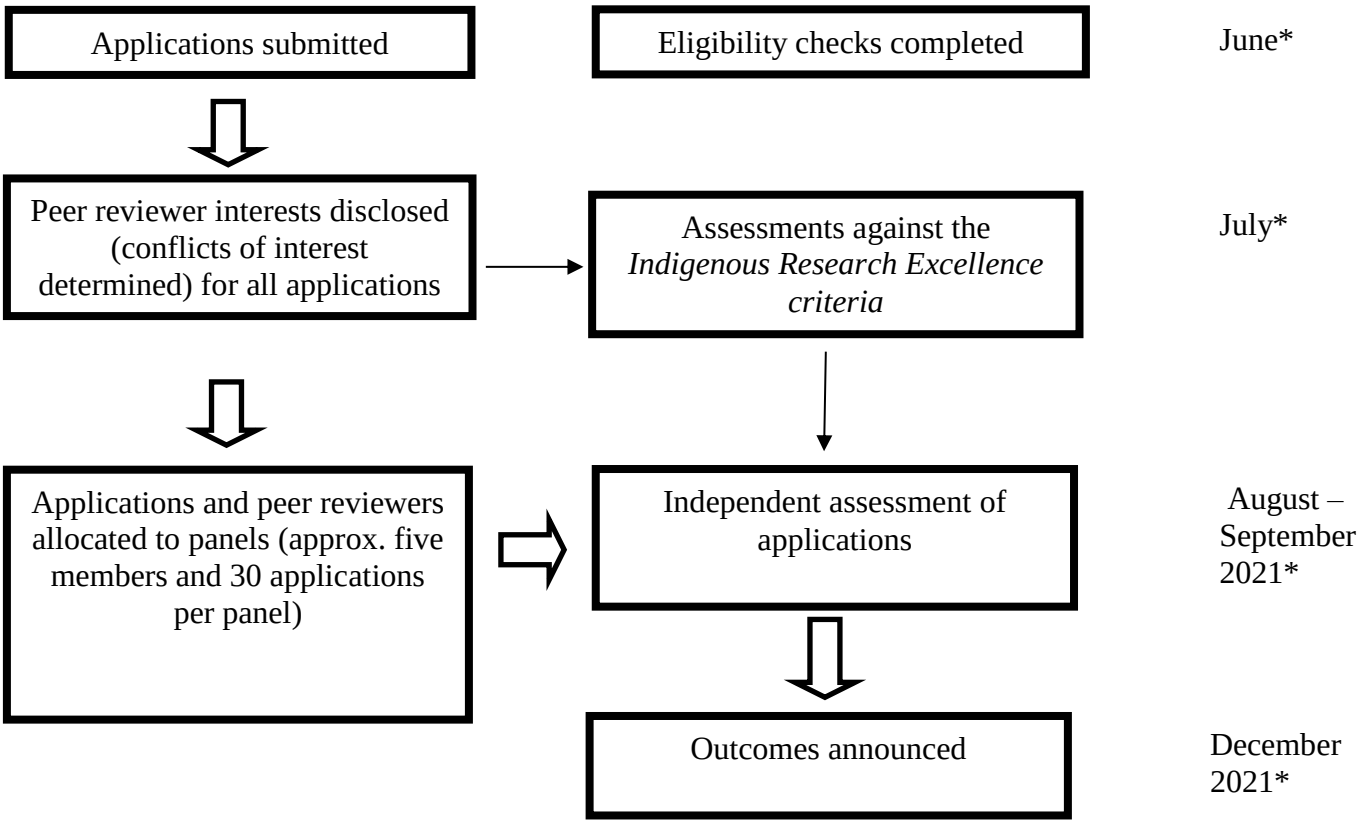
seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, the FoI process includes consultation and exemptions. NHMRC endeavours to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

3.5 Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the NHMRC website.

4 POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP PEER REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 Overview of the Postgraduate Scholarship peer review process



*Dates are indicative

Date	Activity
9 June 2021	Deadline for Postgraduate Scholarship application submission
June	Application eligibility review and confirmation
July	Peer reviewers disclose interests against applications
July	Assessments against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria*/external assessments/other assessments obtained
August	Allocation of applications and members to panels
August/September	Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against Postgraduate Scholarship assessment criteria for each allocated application
December 2021	Notification of outcomes*

*Date is indicative and subject to change.

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 4.3 *Reviewing Postgraduate Scholarship applications.*

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

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

Postgraduate Scholarships Peer Review Participants Table

Roles	Responsibilities
Peer reviewers	Peer reviewers need to: • familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel • provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Postgraduate Scholarship assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendices C and D) for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner • assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable • consider the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E) provided for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus
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. NHMRC staff will: • invite individuals to participate in the Postgraduate Scholarship scheme peer review process as required • determine whether disclosed interests pose a conflict and the level of that conflict. • provide briefings to peer reviewers • determine eligibility of applications • assign applications and peer reviewers to the appropriate panel, and • ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application, and assisting and advising on the peer review process as required • maintain scoring records for each application • act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers, and • seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.
Indigenous health research peer reviewers	Indigenous health research peer reviewers will review how well each application addresses NHMRC's *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E). Indigenous health research peer reviewers may be invited to participate in scoring of applications. In these instances, they may also provide an assessment against the Postgraduate Scholarship scheme assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendices C and D).

Community Observers	NHMRC invites respected members of the general community to observe whether NHMRC policy and procedures are being adhered to during the peer review process. Observers assist NHMRC in ensuring that the assessment of all applications is fair, equitable and impartial. Observers will be briefed on the processes and procedures of the peer review of Postgraduate Scholarship applications. They will not participate in the review of any application. Observers will: • Identify and advise NHMRC of all conflict of interests and monitor the procedural aspects of peer review. • Provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of peer review processes and policies. Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff.

4.3 Reviewing Postgraduate Scholarship applications

All Postgraduate Scholarship applications are assessed against the Postgraduate Scholarships *Assessment Criteria* and the associated *Category Descriptors* at Appendices C and D. Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 4.3.1) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at Appendix E.

4.3.1 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 but in the Dora Lush Basic Research or Clinical Medicine and Science Research Streams, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E) from an assessor with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. For further information on assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians, see *Guidance for Assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* at Appendix F.

The assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* will be considered by peer reviewers when scoring the assessment criteria at Appendix C.

4.3.2 Receipt and initial processing of applications

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

4.3.3 Disclosure of interests

Peer reviewers will be provided with a summary of each application and disclose their interests within NHMRC's grant management system, in accordance with the guidelines provided at Section 3.3 and Appendix B.

Some peer reviewers may have a disclosure of interest for which they require a decision. In this case, NHMRC will assess the information provided by the peer reviewer and provide a ruling on the level of CoI.

4.3.4 Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to panels

Taking into account CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications and peer reviewers to panels of approximately five members. It is expected each panel will be assigned approximately 30 applications. However this is subject to change, depending on the number and peer review area of applications. Each application will be assigned up to five reviews.

The number of panels formed will depend on the total number and type of applications received.

Applications are allocated to a panel based on the applicant's nominated Research Stream.

4.3.5 Briefing

NHMRC will provide peer reviewers briefing material with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the Postgraduate Scholarship peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Further information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process.

4.3.6 Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high CoI exists) and will be required to assess and enter their scores in NHMRC's grant management system. Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the category descriptors, taking into account career disruptions and other 'relative to opportunity' considerations (Appendix G), where applicable.

Up to five independent assessments will be sought for each application.

To ensure they provide independent scores, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores are completed 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' scores will be used to create ranked lists of applications from which funding recommendations will be based. The rating will be determined using each peer reviewer'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.

4.3.6.1 Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must take into account productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations in the assessment of all applications. 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. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions are provided at Appendix G.

4.3.6.2 Mitigating unconscious gender bias in peer review

NHMRC is committed to addressing gender equality to promote fairness, transparency, equality and diversity in health and medical research. Fostering gender equality in peer review is a strategic objective, underpinned by NHMRC's *Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2021*.

Consistent with international practice and to ensure that NHMRC grant applications continue to receive objective and impartial assessments, NHMRC is raising peer reviewers' awareness of unconscious bias in the assessment process.

This is also consistent with the NHMRC document *Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, which states that peer reviewers should be aware of how their own biases (conscious or unconscious) could affect the peer review process, including in relation to gender, ethnicity,

nationality, institutional employer and research discipline).

Peer reviewer participation in the online Harvard Implicit Association Test for gender and science

In support of the objective, NHMRC encourages peer reviewers to complete the online Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) for gender and science. The IAT for gender and science, used by several research funding agencies nationally and internationally, is designed to help participants identify any implicit associations they may have between gender and participation in a science career.

By completing the test, peer reviewers gain a better understanding and increased awareness of how unconscious attitudes may affect their decisions, which prepares them to carry out their duties to the high standards of fairness and rigour expected by NHMRC. Peer reviewers should continue to follow all peer review principles and processes outlined in these guidelines, ensuring that each application is accurately reviewed against the assessment criteria (Appendix C). NHMRC does not have access to, nor does it seek, peer reviewers' information and results for the IAT for gender and science in the peer review process.

Peer reviewers must also familiarise themselves with any additional materials provided by NHMRC about unconscious bias awareness and implicit associations for gender and science during the peer review process.

Use of gender-neutral language

To reduce unconscious gender bias, NHMRC has strongly advised applicants to use gender-neutral language. This will limit the opportunity for unconscious gender bias to affect the assessment process.

The use of gender-neutral language in applications is encouraged, but does not form part of the assessment criteria and therefore should not influence your scoring of applications. Peer reviewers are required to consider the proposal on its merits, taking relative to opportunity considerations into account.

Where gender dimensions are important for the research being proposed, applicants have been advised they should be included in the application. Please refer to scheme-specific category descriptors for information on whether gender dimensions are to be considered as a part of assessment.

4.3.6.3 Industry-relevant experience

Peer reviewers are to recognise an applicant's industry-relevant experience and outputs. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, the *Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience* is provided at Appendix H.

4.3.6.4 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers are to take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field, when assessing the publication component of an applicant's track record. Track record assessment takes into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published.

It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors.

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

4.3.6.5 Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

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 following, as appropriate:

- scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal)
- techniques to be used

- details for appropriate blinding (during allocation, assessment and analysis)
- strategies for randomisation
- details and justification for control groups
- effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study (where appropriate)
- consideration of relevant experimental variables, and
- 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.

4.3.6.6 Research Integrity Issues

The peer review process can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues with applicants (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information) or the behaviour of other peer reviewers. NHMRC has established specific processes for addressing research integrity concerns that arise in peer review. Peer reviewers must not discuss their concerns with other peer reviewers as this may jeopardise the fair assessment of an application. Instead, these issues should be raised with NHMRC separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed are provided on the NHMRC website.

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 Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy* available on the NHMRC website.

4.3.6.7 Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Peer reviewers must not contact applicants about their application under review. If this occurs, the peer reviewer may be removed from the process, and there is the potential for exclusion from future NHMRC peer review.

Where an applicant contacts a peer reviewer, the relevant application may be excluded from consideration.

In either case, contact between applicants and peer reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

4.3.7 Minimum number of assessments

The minimum number of assessments for an application is regarded as 50 percent plus one of the peer reviewers assigned to score an application. If there is an uneven number of peer reviewers assigned to an application, the minimum number of assessments is the next full number after 50 percent (e.g. three assessments in the case of five peer reviewers).

4.3.8 Documentation

Peer reviewers may be required to retain personal notes that they made during the peer review process for a certain period, and if so, these must be held securely and in accordance with reviewers' obligations of confidentiality. NHMRC will notify peer reviewers of any such requirements prior to the peer review process.

4.3.9 Funding Recommendation

Application scores from all peer reviewers are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations to NHMRC's Research Committee and Council for advice to the CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health.

4.3.10 Notification of Outcomes

NHMRC will notify applicants and their Administering Institution's Research Administration Officer of grant application outcomes. Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of an Application Assessment

Summary. The Application Assessment Summary will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by peer reviewers.

Appendix 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 that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the NHMRC website. 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 and/or via GrantConnect.
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.[1]

Independence

- The order of merit determined by peer reviewers is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.

Appropriateness and balance

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

Confidentiality

- NHMRC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition NHMRC is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to its collections and use of personal information, and by the commercial confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act.
- Peer reviewers are to treat applications in-confidence 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 in the peer review process 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.

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

Impartiality

- Peer reviewers must disclose all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect objectivity in considering particular applications.
- Peer reviewers must disclose interests with applications being reviewed, including:
    - research collaborations
    - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
    - employment arrangements
    - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, undermine fair and impartial judgement.
- Disclosures of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in the assessment of 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-scheme 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 peer reviewer or their institution.

Appendix B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Disclosures of Interest

Conflicts of interest frequently are regarded as a positive indicator that peer reviewers are recognised leaders who:

- have expert advice or skills
- have been given professional opportunities
- have received government funding, and
- are supported by the companies working to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia.

A disclosure of interest does not mean that a peer reviewer has engaged in an inappropriate activity. It is a collaboration or relationship which may, or could be perceived to, impact impartial peer review and thus needs to be disclosed and transparently managed (where necessary) to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process. It is the peer reviewer's responsibility to disclose all interests. Failure to do so without a reasonable excuse may result in the peer reviewer being removed from the peer review process in accordance with subsection 44B(3) of the NHMRC Act.

In determining if an interest is a conflict, peer reviewers should give consideration to the following values that underpin the robust nature of peer review:

- **Excellence through expert peer review:** The benefits of peer reviewers' expert advice need to be balanced with the risk of real and or perceived interests affecting an impartial review.
- **Significance:** Not all interests are equal. The type of interest needs to be considered in terms of its significance and time when it occurred.
- **Integrity through disclosure:** Peer review rests on the integrity of peer reviewers to disclose any interests and contribute to transparently managing any real or perceived conflicts in a rigorous way. The peer review system cannot be effective without trusting peer reviewers' integrity.

In determining if an interest is a 'High', 'Low', or 'No' CoI, the responsibility is on the peer reviewer to consider the specific circumstances of the situation. This includes:

- the interest's significance
- its impact on the impartiality of the reviewer, and
- maintaining the integrity of the peer review process.

Once a peer reviewer discloses an interest they can provide an explanation of the interest in NHMRC's grant management system to enable a judgement of its significance. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are encouraged to provide sufficient detail in the explanation such as date (month and year) of collaborations. Disclosures of interest are to be documented for conflicts of interest with both CIs and AIs.

The written declaration of interest is retained for auditing purposes by NHMRC. The details below provide general examples and are not to be regarded as a prescriptive checklist.

HIGH Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)	✓	Peer reviewer is a CI or AI on the application under review.
	✓	Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer has collaborated, in a significant way, on publications within the last three calendar years (co-authorship), or on pending current-round applications, existing NHMRC grants or other grants.
	✓	There is an in/direct association/collaboration between the peer reviewer and a member of the CI team, such that the peer reviewer may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in this research.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation, or is negotiating for employment at the applicant's institution, including: • in the same research field at an independent Medical Research Institute. • in the same Department or School of a university. • in the same Department of a hospital.
	✓	Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
	✓	Peer reviewer would benefit if the proposal was successful as an associate on the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc. for example, a board of the hospital in which the research would be conducted.
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer's organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in the research. for example, a pharmaceutical company, which has provided drugs for testing and therefore has a vested interest in the outcome.
Social relationship and / or interests	✓	The peer reviewer has a known personal/social/perceived relationship with a CI on the application.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer has taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, or co-supervised a CI, within the last three years.
Direct financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has the potential for financial gain if the application is successful, such as, benefits from: payments from resulting patents, supply of goods and services, access to facilities, and provision of cells/animals as part of the collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with that company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer has had an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with the applicant/s. This may still be ruled as a high CoI if the events in question occurred beyond the last three

		years.
	✓	The peer reviewer feels that there are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence, the peer review process.

LOW Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than three years ago.
	✓	Within the last three years the peer reviewer has published with the CI as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors) where the peer reviewer did not interact or collaborate with the CI directly.
	✓	A co-worker is planning future collaborations with a CI.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a named AI on the application are actively collaborating or have previously collaborated within the last three years.
	✓	Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a contributor of the research team have shared cells/animals/reagents/specialist expertise (biostatistician) etc. but have no other connection to each other.
	✓	Collaboration between a peer reviewer's colleague/research group and a CI, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest in the collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer is considering/planning/or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but has no current collaborations or joint applications.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation or is negotiating employment at the applicant's institution
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI work: • at the same institution and do not know each other. • in the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments and do not know each other. • in the same organisation, but the peer reviewer or applicant holds an honorary appointment.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI work for two organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc., but otherwise have no association that would constitute a High decision.
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer's organisation is affiliated with the CI's organisation.
	✓	Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a 'High' decision.
	✓	When the peer reviewer's 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.
Social relationship and / or interests	✓	Peer reviewer's partner or an immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work)/perceived relationship with a CI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI that would be perceived or constitute a 'High' decision.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, or co-supervised a CI, or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by a CI, more than three years ago.
Financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending, supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

	✓	Peer reviewer has intellectual property that is being commercialised by an affiliated institution. Peer reviewer has previously provided and/or received cells/animals to/from a CI on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a 'High' decision.
	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company, and the research proposal may impact upon the company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer may be, or may be perceived to be biased in their review of the application. For example, peer reviewer is a lobbyist on an issue related to the application.

Appendix C – Postgraduate Scholarship 2021 Assessment Criteria

Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships are assessed by peers against the assessment criteria listed below and the category descriptors at Appendix D.

- Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity (60%)
- Research Environment and Supervisor (20%)
- Research Project (20%)

Applications are assessed relative to opportunity, taking into consideration any career disruptions, where applicable (see Appendix G).

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants often 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 will be considered when assessing research output and track record (see Appendices E, F and H).

Appendix D – Postgraduate Scholarship 2021 Category Descriptors

The following scoring descriptors are to be used as a guide to score an application against each of the assessment criteria. The category descriptors are indicative, rather than definitive or exhaustive. Evaluation of performance will take into account opportunity, research discipline and overall summation of research contribution.

Note: Applications that do not align with the Research Stream applied for should score a '1' for Criterion 3 – Research Project.

Assessing Indigenous Contributions

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants often 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 and track record.

Score	Criterion 1 Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Criterion 2 Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Criterion 3 Research Project 20%
7 Exemplary *An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with no weaknesses.* *It is expected that the top 2% of applications would be ranked in this category.*	**<u>Exemplary</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment And Supervisor:** • are **extremely well matched** to the applicant's proposed project • provide **exemplary** mentoring and training arrangements • include **extremely high quality** research support systems for the applicant • offer **exceptional** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **exemplary** opportunity to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **extremely well-defined** • is **flawless** in design • will be achieved • will make an **exemplary** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
6 Outstanding *An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with negligible weaknesses.* *It is expected that the top 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.*	**<u>Outstanding</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or	**The Research Environment And Supervisor:** • are **very well matched** to the applicant's proposed project • include **outstanding** mentoring and training arrangements • offer **very high quality** research support systems for the applicant • offer **outstanding** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **outstanding** potential to extend the	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **very well-defined** • is **nearly flawless** in design • is **highly feasible** • will make an **outstanding** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	**Research Environment and Supervisor 20%**	**Research Project 20%**
	research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	applicant's knowledge and skills.	
5 Excellent *An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria with only some minor weaknesses.* *It is expected that the top 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.*	**<u>Excellent</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment And Supervisor:** • are **well matched** to the applicant's proposed project • are **very well suited to** with the research stream applied for • include **excellent** mentoring and training arrangements • offer **high quality** research support systems for the applicant • offer **excellent** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **excellent** potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **well-defined** • is **very well designed** • is **highly feasible** • will make an **excellent** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
4 Very good *An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with numerous minor weaknesses* *It is expected that the top 65% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.*	**<u>Very Good</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment And Supervisor:** • are **suited** to the applicant's proposed project • are **well suited to** the research stream applied for • include **very good quality** mentoring and training arrangements • offer very **good quality** research support systems for the applicant • offer **very good** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **very good** potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **clear** • is **well designed** • is **feasible** • will make a **very good** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
3 Good *An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with at least one moderate weakness* *It is expected that the bottom 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.*	**<u>Good</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment And Supervisor:** • are **adequate** to the applicant's proposed project • are **suited** to the research stream applied for • include **good quality** mentoring and training arrangements • offer **good quality** research support systems for the applicant • offer **good** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **good** potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **adequately defined** • is clear overall in design • is **likely to be achieved** • will make a **good** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations. •

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	**Research Environment and Supervisor 20%**	**Research Project 20%**
2 Satisfactory *An application which partly meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria with noticeable deficiencies or shortcomings evident by some moderate weaknesses* *It is expected that the bottom 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.*	**<u>Sound</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment and Supervisor:** • are **somewhat suited** to the applicant's proposed project • are **somewhat suited** to the research stream applied for • include **satisfactory** mentoring and training arrangements • offer **satisfactory** research support systems for the applicant • offer **satisfactory** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **satisfactory** potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **aligned** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **somewhat unclearly defined** • **raises some concerns** with respect to research design • **raises some concerns** with respect to feasibility • will make a **satisfactory** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
1 Weak *An application which marginally meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Shortcomings or deficiencies against most criteria or aims predominate* *It is expected that the bottom 5% of applications would be ranked in this category.*	**<u>Limited</u> Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):** • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement as evidenced by quality of publications in their field • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement.	**The Research Environment and Supervisor:** • are **not ideal** to the applicant's proposed project • are **not suited** to the research stream applied for • include **limited** mentoring and training arrangements • offer **limited** research support systems for the applicant • offer **limited** collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer **limited** potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.	**The Research Project:** • is **<u>not aligned</u>** with the Research stream applied for • has objectives that are **unclear** • **raises major concerns** with respect to research design • **raises major concerns** with respect to feasibility • will make a **limited** contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.

Appendix E - 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.

Peer reviewers will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, when scoring the *Assessment Criteria* set out in Appendix C.

Appendix F – Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

Peer reviewers 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?

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?

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 wellbeing?

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?

Appendix G – NHMRC Relative to Opportunity Policy

Purpose

NHMRC's goal is to support the highest quality research that will lead to improvements in health over the short or long term. Peer review by independent experts is used to identify well-designed feasible projects that address a significant question and are undertaken by researchers with demonstrated capacity to perform high quality research.

In most NHMRC grant schemes, peer reviewers are asked to assess the track record of the applicants as well as the proposed research. However, NHMRC recognises that not all research careers are the same and therefore peer reviewers are asked to assess track records "relative to opportunity", taking into account circumstances that have affected the applicant's research productivity.

The purpose of this document is to outline NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy with respect to:

- peer review of applicant track records
- eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants.

Policy approach

NHMRC considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that peer reviewers should assess an applicant's track record of research productivity and professional contribution in the context of their career stage and circumstances, by taking into consideration whether the applicant's productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to them.

The policy has two components:

- Career Disruption – a prolonged interruption to the ability to work due to pregnancy, illness/injury and/or carer responsibilities. Career Disruptions are taken into account in track record assessment and in determining an applicant's eligibility to hold an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant (in terms of years since they received their PhD).

- Other Relative to Opportunity considerations – any other personal or professional circumstances affecting research productivity. These circumstances are taken into account in track record assessment.

In addition to *NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review,* particularly fairness and transparency, the following principles support this objective:

- **Research opportunity**: Researchers' outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and the research they conduct.

- **Fair access**: Researchers should have access to the funding available through NHMRC's grant program consistent with their experience and career stage.

- **Career diversity**: Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside academia should not be disadvantaged. NHMRC recognises that time spent in other sectors, such as industry, may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

NHMRC expects that peer reviewers will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review.

Consideration of career circumstances during peer review of grant applications

Under the Relative to Opportunity policy, researchers' career circumstances are considered during track record assessment. This aims to take into account salient research opportunity considerations over the course of a research career and is not intended to address minor changes to life circumstances.

Circumstances considered during peer review include, but are not limited to:

Research

- research role(s) and responsibilities, career stage, and amount of time spent as an active researcher

Resources and facilities

- available resources and facilities, including:
    - the extent to which any additional research personnel and/or collaborators contribute to the applicant's research program
    - situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities

Professional responsibilities

- clinical, administrative and/or teaching workload
- time employed in other sectors
- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods

Personal circumstances

- disability (including mental health conditions and psychosocial disability) or illness
- caring responsibilities that do not interrupt the applicant's career for an extended period (that would meet the definition of a Career Disruption) but still affect research productivity
- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including 'sorry business'
- any other personal circumstances

Other circumstances

- relocation of an applicant and their research laboratory or clinical practice setting
- periods of unemployment
- calamities, such as pandemics, bushfires or cyclones.

Relative to Opportunity considerations do not include:

- minor (or short-term) changes that occur during the normal course of conducting research, e.g. broken equipment or delayed ethics approval
- minor (or short-term) medical conditions
- recreational leave or general administrative activities related to research, such as preparation of grant applications and publications or committee-related activities.

Consideration of Career Disruption during peer review and in determining eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants

A Career Disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant's capacity to work, due to:

- pregnancy
- major illness/injury
- carer responsibilities.

The period of Career Disruption may be used:

- to determine an applicant's eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant
- to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
- for consideration of track record relative to opportunity by peer reviewers.

A period of Career Disruption is defined as:

- a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
- continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.[1]

In determining eligibility of Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant applicants, the 10-year limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.

NOTE: For the purposes of peer review, circumstances not meeting the definition of Career Disruption may be considered under the career circumstances provisions above.

[1] For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a Career Disruption of 90 calendar days.

Appendix H – Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience

Principles

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that knowledge from health and medical research is translated through commercialisation (e.g. by pharmaceutical or medical devices companies), improvements to policy, health service delivery and clinical practice.

Therefore, as a complement to other measures of research excellence (e.g. publication and citation rates), NHMRC considers industry-relevant skills, experience and achievements in its assessment of applicants' track records.

These measures recognise that applicants who have invested their research time on technology transfer, commercialisation or collaborating with industry, may have gained highly valuable expertise or outputs relevant to research translation. However, NHMRC acknowledges that these researchers will necessarily have had fewer opportunities to produce traditional academic research outputs (e.g. peer reviewed publications).

Therefore, peer reviewers should:

- Appropriately recognise applicants' industry-relevant experiences and results
- Allow for the time applicants have spent in commercialisation/industry for *"Relative to Opportunity"* considerations.

Who might have industry experience or be preparing for industry experience?

Many applicants to NHMRC may have had industry experiences of various kinds. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Researchers who have left academia to pursue a full time career in industry (e.g. in pharmaceutical, biotechnology or start-up companies). In such instances, outputs must be assessed 'relative to opportunity', as there may have been restrictions in producing traditional research outputs (such as peer reviewed publications), but highly valuable expertise gained or outputs produced relevant to research translation (such as patents or new clinical guidelines).
2. Academic researchers whose work has a possible commercial focus. These researchers might not have yet entered into commercial agreements with industry and have chosen to forego or delay publication in order to protect or extend their intellectual property (IP).
3. Academic researchers who have translated their discovery into a collaborative agreement with industry. The researcher may be collaborating with the company in further research and development; may have a licensing agreement; or may have licensed or assigned their IP to the company. A researcher may ultimately leave the academic institution and become Chief Executive Officer, Chief Scientific Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Scientific Advisory Board Member or consultant for a start-up or other company, based on their experience.
4. Academic researchers who are actively collaborating with companies, for example by providing expert research services for fees. Publications of such work might be precluded or delayed according to contract arrangements. The specialised nature of this research might also restrict publication to specialised journals only, as opposed to generalist journals.

Relevant industry outputs

Level of experience/ output	IP	Collaboration with an industry partner	Established a start-up company	Product to market	Clinical trials or regulatory activities	Industry participation
Advanced	• Patent granted: consider the type of patent and where it is granted. It can be more difficult to be granted a patent in, for example, the US or Europe than in Australia, depending on the patent prosecution and regulatory regime of the intended market • National phase entry and prosecution or specified country application	• Executed a licensing agreement with an established company • Significant research contract with an industry partner • Long term consultancy with an industry partner	• Achieved successful exit (public market flotation, merger or acquisition) • Raised significant (>$10m) funding from venture capital or other commercial sources (not grant funding bodies) • Chief Scientific Officer, Executive or non-executive role on company boards	• Produce sales • Successful regulator submission to US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Medicines Agency, TGA etc. • Medical device premarket submission e.g. FDA 510(k) approved	• Phase II or Phase III underway or completed	• Major advisory or consultancy roles with international companies
Intermediate	• Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) or 'international application' • Provisional patent	• Established a formal arrangement such as a consultancy or research contract and actively collaborating	• Incorporated an entity and established a board • Has raised moderate (>$1m) funding from commercial sources or government schemes that required industry co-participation (e.g. ARC Linkage, NHMRC	• Generated regulatory standard data set • Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or European Conformity (CE) marking • Medical device: applications for pre-market	• Phase I underway or completed • Protocol development • Patient recruitment	• Advisory or consultancy role with a national company

			Development Grant)	**approval**		
Preliminary	**• IP generated • Patent application lodged • Invention lodged with Disclosure/s with Technology Transfer/Commercialisation Office**	**• Approached and in discussion with an industry partner under a non-disclosure agreement. No other formal contractual arrangements.**	**• Negotiated licence to IP from the academic institution**	**• Developed pre-good manufacturing practice (GMP) prototype and strong supporting data • Established quality systems**	**• Drug candidate selected or Investigative New Drug application filed • Preclinical testing**	