



Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 Peer Review Guidelines

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Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Sapphire assistance and enquiries:	<p>NHMRC Research Help Centre</p> <p>Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers)</p> <p>Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au</p> <p>Note: NHMRC's Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within 2 working days. This timeframe may be longer during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.</p>
Postgraduate Scholarships enquiries	Email: scholarships@nhmrc.gov.au

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Key changes	4
3. Principles, conduct and obligations during peer review	5
3.1. NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review	5
3.2. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research	6
3.3. Use of generative artificial intelligence in peer review	6
3.4. Disclosures of interest	6
3.4.1. What is an interest?	6
3.4.2. What is a conflict of interest (Col)?	6
3.4.3. Disclosure of interests in the peer review process	7
3.4.4. Failure to disclose an interest	7
3.5. Freedom of information (Fol)	7
3.6. Complaints	8
4. Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process	8
4.1. Overview of the Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process	8
4.2. Roles and responsibilities	8
4.2.1. Peer reviewers	8
4.2.2. NHMRC Staff	9
4.2.3. Indigenous health research peer reviewers	9
4.2.4. Community observers	9
4.3. Reviewing Postgraduate Scholarship applications	10
4.3.1. Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus	10
4.3.2. Receipt and initial processing of applications	10
4.3.3. Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability	10
4.3.4. Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to panels	11
4.3.5. Briefing	11
4.3.6. Assessment of applications	11
4.3.7. Quorum/Minimum number of assessments	15
4.3.8. Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants	16
4.3.9. Documentation	16
4.3.10. Funding recommendation	16
4.3.11. Notification of outcomes	16

Appendices	17	
Appendix A	Understanding the Principles of Peer Review	18
Appendix B	Guidance for declaring and assessing disclosures of interest	20
Appendix C	Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 Assessment criteria	25
Appendix D	Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 Score descriptors	26
Appendix E	Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria	30
Appendix F	Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria	31
Appendix G	Guide to evaluating industry-relevant experience	33

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 Scholarships 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 2026 grant opportunity guidelines (PGS 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 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

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 grant opportunity:

- **Track Record:** In addition to Publications, 'Research Outputs' can be included in the Top 10 in 10. The score descriptor for Academic Record and Achievements has been updated to reflect this inclusion (see [Appendix D](#) and Section 6 in [Appendix C](#) - Guide to Applicants of the PGS Guidelines).
- **Grant proposal page limit:** - The total pages for the grant proposal attachment has been increased from 5 to 6 pages: 5 pages for the research proposal and 1 page for a separate references section (section 6.9.2 Appendix C - Guide to Applicants).
- The *Statement on Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation in Health and Medical Research* is being embedded in application and assessment processes (see section 7.6 of the PGS guidelines) including:
 - The Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 application form in Sapphire includes a new mandatory question about the integration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation in the proposed research (see [Appendix C](#) - Guide to Applicants of the PGS Guidelines).

- The score descriptor for the Research Project assessment criterion includes an additional component on the appropriateness of how sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation are integrated in the proposed research and/or the strength of the justification for why any of these Variables are not integrated (see Appendix D).
- Explanation of fundable applications has been included (section 8.1.2 of the PGS Guidelines).
- Any images of people must be appropriately de-identified or informed consent must have been given – an additional check has been included for applicants in Section 8 of [Appendix C](#) - Guide to Applicants of the PGS Guidelines.

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). This includes adhering to the key principles and applicable requirements of the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024* (CGRPs) and the published grant opportunity guidelines.

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, where relevant.
- **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. Use of generative artificial intelligence in peer review

Peer reviewers must not input any part of a grant application, or any information from a grant application, into a natural language processing and/or artificial intelligence technology system to assist them in the assessment of applications, as per [NHMRC's Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Grant Applications and Peer Review](#).

3.4. Disclosures of interest

3.4.1. 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.

3.4.2. What is a conflict of interest (Col)?

A Col 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 Col 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 Col situations and guidance is provided for peer reviewers at [Appendix B](#).

3.4.3. 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' Col will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of NHMRC.

3.4.4. 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.

3.5. Freedom of information (Fol)

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 Fol process includes consultation and exemptions. NHMRC endeavours to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

3.6. Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. NHMRC may contact peer reviewers 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 Scholarships peer review process

4.1. Overview of the Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process

The Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 peer review processes indicative timeline is as follows:

Date	Activity
3 June 2026 17:00 ACT local time	Deadline for Postgraduate Scholarship application submission
June 2026	Application eligibility review
June 2026 (2-week period)	Peer reviewers disclose interests (and suitability) against applications
July 2026 (2-week period)	Assessments against the <i>Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria</i> obtained
July 2026	Peer reviewer briefing held
July 2026	Applications allocated to Peer reviewers
July / August 2026 (4-week period)	Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against the Postgraduate Scholarship assessment criteria for each allocated application
November 2026*	Anticipated notification of outcomes

*Dates are indicative and subject to change

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 4.3.

4.2. Roles and responsibilities

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

4.2.1. 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 them
- provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Postgraduate Scholarship assessment criteria and associated score descriptors ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)) in a timely manner, for each non-conflicted application assigned

- 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 confirmed to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus.

4.2.2. 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.
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers
- provide briefings to peer reviewers
- determine eligibility of applications
- assign applications and peer reviewers to the appropriate panel/ to the appropriate peer reviewers based on peer reviewers’ declaration of interests
- 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
- seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.

4.2.3. 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](#)) where applicable.

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 assessment criteria and associated score descriptors ([Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#)).

4.2.4. 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 Scholarship assessment criteria and the associated score descriptors at [Appendix C](#) and [Appendix 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. Peer reviewers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will check whether these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* ([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 E](#).

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 and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with a summary of each application and disclose their interests within Sapphire, in accordance with the guidelines provided at section 3.4 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 Col.

While the Postgraduate Scholarship scheme allocates applications to peer reviewers based on Peer Review Areas of the Peer reviewers and the Research Stream of the applications, Peer reviewers are requested to indicate their level of suitability to assess each application, based on the information available to them in the application summary. Instructions and tutorials for selecting this in Sapphire are provided in the [Sapphire Learning and Training Resources](#).

4.3.4. Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to panels

Considering CoIs and peer reviewer research areas, NHMRC staff will assign peer reviewers and applications to panels of approximately 6 members. It is expected each panel will be assigned approximately 20 applications to review. However, this is subject to change, depending on the number and peer review areas of applications. Each application will be assigned up to 5 reviews. The number of panels formed will depend on the total number and type of applications received.

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

4.3.5. Briefing

NHMRC will provide peer reviewers briefing and supporting materials, as necessary, with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Additional information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process. Further information and tutorials are available from Sapphire.

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 Sapphire. Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the score descriptors, taking into account career disruptions and other '[relative to opportunity](#)' considerations, where applicable.

NHMRC will aim to obtain 5 independent assessments for each application.

To ensure that independent scores are provided, 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 overall score for each application will be determined using each peer reviewer's score for each of the assessment criteria. The overall score, as calculated arithmetically to 3 decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

4.3.6.1. Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must assess productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations, in the assessment of all applications. This is reflected in [NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy](#), 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.

4.3.6.2. Mitigating bias in peer review

NHMRC is raising peer reviewers' awareness of unconscious bias in the assessment process, in alignment with international practice and to ensure that NHMRC grant applications continue to receive objective and impartial assessments. Understanding bias enables peer reviewers' to critically and independently review applications and avoid suboptimal or unfair outcomes.

This is underpinned by NHMRC's 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.

To minimise or avoid bias, peer reviewers are encouraged to take action to address the unintended and systematic biases which prevent unprejudiced consideration of an application. To increase peer reviewers' awareness of the types of cognitive biases that can occur during peer review, NHMRC recommends the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) guidance on [Rethinking Research Assessment](#).

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

NHMRC is committed to its vision of a gender diverse and inclusive health and medical research workforce to take advantage of the full range of talent needed to build a healthy Australia. Fostering gender equity in peer review is a strategic objective underpinned by [NHMRC's Gender Equity Strategy](#).

In support of the objective, NHMRC encourages peer reviewers to complete the online 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 during the peer review process.

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 G](#).

4.3.6.4. Assessment of the publication component of an applicant's track record

Peer reviewers are to consider 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 considers 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. Journal-based metrics, if included by an applicant, should not be taken into consideration in the assessment of publications.

Instead, peer reviewers are to focus on the creativity and innovation of ideas, rigour of experimental design, appropriate use of statistical methods, reproducibility of results, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, all of which serve as surrogates for measuring research quality of a publication, irrespective of the field of research.

ONHMRC also encourages the use of research quality guidelines such as the Hong Kong Principles for assessing researchers¹, which recommends focussing on responsible research practices, transparent reporting, open science, diversity of research and recognition of all contributions to research as hallmarks of publication quality.

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

¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.3000737>

- effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study (where appropriate)
- consideration of relevant experimental variables
- integration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation and/or justification for why any of these Variables are not integrated
- any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

4.3.6.6. Consideration of Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation

The [Statement on Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation in Health and Medical Research](#) has been developed to improve health outcomes for all people in Australia by ensuring the evidence base that informs our health care system considers sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation (the Variables). It provides a guide for researchers to consider the Variables at all stages of their research project. Applicants for NHMRC funding:

- must consider sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation at all stages of every research project

- should use consistent definitions and classifications according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation](#).

In addition, applicants are expected to integrate sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation in their proposed research where appropriate. The application form includes a mandatory question on integration of the Variables. Here applicants must indicate which of the Variables are integrated in the proposed research and summarise how they will be integrated, or they must justify why any/all of the Variables have not been integrated. For some research projects it may not be relevant to address all or any of these Variables. If the relevant Variables are being integrated into the proposed research, then this should also be detailed within the Grant Proposal (in addition to this section of the form).

Peer reviewers are to consider the information provided on the Variables in both the response to the application form question and, where applicable, the Grant Proposal, when scoring applications against the relevant assessment criteria. Applicants may choose to include or exclude the Variables in their application, provided they offer a sound, evidence-based justification for their decision. Peer reviewers should give equal consideration to both approaches, focusing on the strength and validity of the rationale rather than the presence or absence of the Variables.

Where relevant, a high-quality description of how sex, gender, variation of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation are integrated into a research project should include:

- which of the Variables are relevant to the research question(s) and which research participants/subjects will be included to reflect this
- the target distribution of participants/subjects by the relevant Variable(s) and why this distribution has been selected to answer the research question(s)

- planned strategies for meeting the target distribution of population groups (e.g., inclusive eligibility criteria, strategies for recruiting and retaining participants or procuring, managing and storing/housing subjects)
- the plan for collecting, analysing and presenting data by the relevant Variable(s), including use of the [ABS 2020 Standard](#) where appropriate.

The above should be summarised in response to the application question with more detail provided in the Grant Proposal as required. The appropriateness of the described target distribution of participants/subjects by the relevant Variable(s) depends on the research question(s). There may be scientifically sound and evidence-based justifications for focusing on a single population group for one or more of the Variables. Peer reviewers are to consider this when scoring applications against the assessment criteria.

Further information and supporting resources on integrating the Variables in research are available on NHMRC's [gender equity webpage](#).

4.3.6.7. Research Integrity Issues

The peer review process can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues with applications or 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. NHMRC provides [advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed](#).

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](#).

4.3.6.8. 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. Quorum/Minimum number of assessments

The minimum number of assessments for an application is regarded as 50% 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% (e.g. 3 assessments in the case of 5 peer reviewers).

4.3.8. Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

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

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

The principles are:

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

4.3.9. 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.

4.3.10. Funding recommendation

Final 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 the Minister for Health and Ageing.

4.3.11. 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 eligible 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.



Appendices

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.
- Peer reviewers must only address information provided in the application based on its relevance to the assessment criteria. Any information or issues relating to the applicant(s) outside of the application must not be considered in the peer reviewers' assessment. 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 in the [NHMRC Complaints Policy](#). All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website and/or via [GrantConnect](#).
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.²

Independence

- Peer reviewers must provide independent and impartial assessment of applications. Peer reviewer assessments may be informed by input from other experts (e.g. in panel meetings or when considering expert reports) but must not be unduly influenced by the views of other researchers or stakeholders.
- 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.

² Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.

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.

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

Peer reviewers³ are required to disclose all interests that are relevant, or could appear to be relevant, to the proposed research.

An interest is a collaboration or relationship which may, or could be perceived to, affect 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 essential that peer reviewers not only disclose their own actual interests relating to proposed research (real interest), but also collaborations and relationships that could be perceived by stakeholders to affect impartial peer review (perceived interest). 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.

A disclosure does not always equate to a conflict of interest (CoI). 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:

- **Impartiality:** The benefits of peer reviewers' expert advice needs to be balanced with the risk of real 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' conflict, 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 Sapphire to enable a judgement of its significance. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are required to provide sufficient detail in the explanation, such as date (month and year) and nature of the interest.

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.

³ For the purposes of disclosing interests, in Appendix B the term peer reviewers also includes observers and NHMRC staff.

HIGH Conflict of Interest – situations and examples

Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI) and/or Supervisor

- Peer reviewer is a CI or a Supervisor 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 is actively collaborating or has collaborated with the CI or the Primary Supervisor in the last 3 calendar years on publications (co-authorship), pending grant applications and/or existing grants.

Working relationships

- Peer reviewer and the CI or Primary Supervisor currently work or are negotiating future employment in the same:
 - research field at an independent Medical Research Institute;
 - Department or School of a university;
 - Department of a hospital.
- Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within the same organisation as the CI or the Primary Supervisor, or has a pecuniary interest in the organisation (either perceived or real) e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor are on the same committee/board and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would stand to benefit from, or be affected, by the outcome of the application (i.e. vested interested in the proposed research). For example, peer reviewer and CI/Primary Supervisor are both on the same governing board within their organisation.

Professional relationships and interests

- Peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's employer is directly affiliated or associated with an organisation(s) 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, has a vested interest in the outcome.

Social relationship and / or interests

- The peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's immediate family member has a personal or social relationship with the CI or the Primary Supervisor on the application.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- Peer reviewer has taught or supervised a CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies within the last 3 years.
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor co-supervise an undergraduate or postgraduate student and collaborate with each other on the student's research.

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.
- Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company, and the research proposal may affect the company.

Other interests or situations

- Peer reviewer had or has an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with the CI. This may still be ruled as a high conflict if the events in question occurred beyond the last 3 years.
- There are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence the peer review process. In these instances, sufficient details must be provided to allow NHMRC to make a ruling.

LOW Conflict of Interest – situations and examples

Collaborations

- Peer reviewer and the CI on the application have collaborated more than 3 years ago.
- Within the last 3 years, the peer reviewer was part of large collaborations involving the CI/Primary Supervisor, BUT did not interact or collaborate with the CI/Primary Supervisor directly. Examples of large collaborations include:
 - Publication(s) as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors)
 - Pending grant applications or existing grants involving more than ten CIs (e.g. large collaborative research centres and network grants)
- A colleague is planning future collaborations with the CI or the Primary Supervisor.
- Peer reviewer and a secondary supervisor on the application are actively collaborating or have previously collaborated within the last 3 years.
- Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a member 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 the CI/Primary Supervisor on the application, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest (e.g. direct leadership or responsibility for the researchers involved in the collaboration) in the collaboration, or vice versa.
- Peer reviewer is considering, planning or has planned a future collaboration with the CI/Primary Supervisor on the application but has no current collaborations, including joint publications/applications under development.
- Peer reviewer and CI/Primary Supervisor have previously proposed or planned a collaboration that did not progress.

Working relationships

- Current working or professional relationship between peer reviewer and Primary Supervisor.
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor currently work or are negotiating future employment in:
 - the same institution but have no direct association or collaboration.
 - the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor work for 2 organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor are on the same committee/board, but otherwise have no working or social relationships that constitute a high conflict and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would not benefit from, or be affected by, the outcome of the application (i.e. do not have a vested interest in the proposed research). For example, the

peer reviewer and CI/Primary Supervisor are both on an external government advisory committee.

Professional relationships and interests

- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor's organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI or the Primary Supervisor and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a high conflict.

Social relationship and/or interests

- Peer reviewer's partner or immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work) or perceived relationship with the CI or the Primary Supervisor on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI or the Primary Supervisor that would be perceived or constitute a high conflict.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- Peer reviewer taught or supervised the CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by a CI, more than 3 years ago.
- Peer reviewer taught or supervised the Primary Supervisor for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised the Primary Supervisor or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by the Primary Supervisor.
- Peer reviewer and the CI or the Primary Supervisor are co-supervisors of an undergraduate or postgraduate student, but they are not collaborating with each other on the student's research (e.g. where one of the supervisors may provide additional expert input or guidance to the student's project or thesis).

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 the CI or a Supervisor 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 the CI or a Supervisor on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a high conflict.

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 Scholarships 2026

Assessment criteria

Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships are assessed by peers against the assessment criteria listed below and the score 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.

Criterion 1: The Academic Record and Research Achievement assessment criterion is assessed against: academic record, medals and prizes, research achievements, presentations, training and community engagement. These are included in the application in the academic transcript, the profile and in the specific answers to the questions in the application form, as well as the top 10 in 10 list of publications or research output in the last 10 years. This criterion is assessed [relative to opportunity](#), taking into consideration any career disruptions, where applicable.

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.

Criterion 2: The Research environment and Supervisor criterion is assessed on how well the research environment and supervisor are matched to the applicant's projects, the quality of the mentoring and training arrangements, the quality of research supports for applicants and the opportunities available to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.

Criterion 3: The Research Project criterion is assessed against how well the research project objectives are defined, how well the project is designed, how feasible it is and the extent to which it will contribute to the applicant's future career aspirations. It will also consider how appropriately the Variables have been integrated into the Grant Proposal, or where they are not integrated, how well this has been justified.

Appendix D Postgraduate Scholarships 2026 Score descriptors

The following scoring descriptors are to be used as a guide to score an application against each of the assessment criteria. The score descriptors are indicative, rather than definitive or exhaustive. Evaluation of performance will take into account opportunity, research discipline and overall summation of research contribution. Applications with an overall score equal to or above 3.500 and minimum mean score of 3.000 in all assessment criteria are potentially fundable, subject to the availability of funds.

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 <i>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.</i>	Exemplary Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs presentations, including posters and seminars postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience broader community engagement. 	The Research Environment and Supervisor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are extremely well-defined is flawless in design is highly feasible will make an exemplary contribution to the applicant’s future career aspirations has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation extremely appropriately and/or has an extremely strong justification for why any Variables are not integrated.



Score	Criterion 1: Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Criterion 2 Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Criterion 3 Research Project 20%
<p>6 Outstanding</p> <p><i>An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with negligible weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p>Outstanding Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation highly appropriately and/or has a very strong justification for why any Variables are not integrated.
<p>5 Excellent</p> <p><i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria with only some minor weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p>Excellent Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation very appropriately and/or has a strong justification for why any Variables are not integrated.

Score	Criterion 1: Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Criterion 2 Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Criterion 3 Research Project 20%
<p>4 Very good <i>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.</i></p>	<p>Very Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has objectives that are clear • is well designed • is feasible • will make a very good contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation appropriately and/or has a solid justification for why any Variables are not integrated.
<p>3 Good <i>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.</i></p>	<p>Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has objectives that are adequately defined • is clear overall in design • is likely to be feasible • will make a good contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation somewhat appropriately and/or has a limited justification for why any Variables are not integrated.



Score	Criterion 1: Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Criterion 2 Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Criterion 3 Research Project 20%
<p>2 Satisfactory</p> <p><i>An application which partly meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria with noticeable deficiencies or shortcomings evident by some moderate weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the bottom 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</i></p>	<p>Sound Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation somewhat inappropriately and/or has little or flawed justification for why any Variables are not integrated.
<p>1 Weak</p> <p><i>An application which marginally meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria.</i></p> <p><i>Shortcomings or deficiencies against most criteria or aims predominate</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the bottom 5% of applications would be ranked in this category.</i></p>	<p>Limited Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement in their field as evidenced by the research quality and contribution to science of their publications and/or research outputs • presentations, including posters and seminars • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not ideal for 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. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • has integrated sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation inappropriately and/or has no justification for why any Variables are not integrated.



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 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.

Table 1. Relevant industry outputs

	Advanced	Intermediate	Preliminary
IP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) or 'international application' Provisional patent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IP generated Patent application lodged Invention lodged with Disclosure/s with Technology Transfer/Commercialisation Office
Collaboration with an industry partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executed a licensing agreement with an established company Significant research contract with an industry partner Long term consultancy with an industry partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a formal arrangement such as a consultancy or research contract and actively collaborating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approached and in discussion with an industry partner under a non-disclosure agreement. No other formal contractual arrangements.

	Advanced	Intermediate	Preliminary
Established a start-up company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Development Grant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiated licence to IP from the academic institution
Product to market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generated regulatory standard data set Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or European Conformity (CE) marking Medical device: applications for pre-market approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed pre-good manufacturing practice (GMP) prototype and strong supporting data Established quality systems
Clinical trials or regulatory activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase II or Phase III underway or completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase I underway or completed Protocol development Patient recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug candidate selected or Investigative New Drug application filed Preclinical testing
Industry participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major advisory or consultancy roles with international companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory or consultancy role with a national company 	