

Request for Proposals

March 2020



2020 HRC-NSFC Biomedical Collaboration Fund

Overview

The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) have established a funding initiative to support the development of collaborative research relationships between the two countries, each providing matched funding to the research partners in their own country. HRC has a fund of \$1,000,000 (exclusive of GST) for allocation to New Zealand-based researchers. There are two separate funding opportunities available to apply for.

Stream one project:

funding partners invite applications for funding of up to \$700,000 (fully-costed, exclusive of GST) and duration of up to three years for a research project.

Stream two emerging researcher grant:

emerging researchers are invited to apply for funding to facilitate collaborative research relationships with Chinese colleagues. Up to \$100,000 for a duration of up to two years for emerging researchers (there are three available).

NSFC and HRC are jointly responsible for the funding decisions. HRC funding will support the successful New Zealand project teams, and NSFC's funding will support the Chinese project teams in the same collaboration. This Request for Proposals (RFP) applies only to the New Zealand application process; Chinese researchers must consult with NSFC regarding their own separate application requirements and process.

It is anticipated that funding for one 3-year project and three 2-year emerging researcher collaborations will be available for a late 2020 start date. The HRC's strong focus on peer review and contestability will ensure successful applicants deliver the highest quality research outcomes.



1. Background

This initiative aims to establish new and/or strengthen existing collaborations in biomedical sciences between Chinese and New Zealand researchers from universities and research institutions, foster breakthroughs in biomedical research that will advance the global development of science and technology, and promote mobility and career development of researchers within joint projects.

Under the overarching framework of the New Zealand Health Research Strategy, the objectives of this initiative are to:

- Focus on complementary subject areas of metabolic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, brain health and respiratory diseases.
- Leverage international research and infrastructure capabilities in areas posing significant health-based challenges to New Zealand and our international partners; and
- Profile New Zealand health science and innovation and our ability to contribute to global health challenges.

2. Stream one: research project requirements

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This grant will create opportunities for New Zealand scientists to identify and exploit opportunities through collaborations with Chinese researchers. Applicants to the scheme will conduct health research using existing collaborations and identify opportunities to improve health outcomes and healthcare delivery. Investment will focus on building knowledge and technologies to prevent, diagnose, and manage the priority areas.

While the research will build on relationships developed over time, the proposed project must be a new one. Proposals must involve a genuine collaboration with at least one Chinese research team. The proposed collaboration should be additional to the research organisations current activities and requires joint input of both the New Zealand and the Chinese team to be successful. Successful proposals will present a vision for long-term, sustainable international collaborations.

Four health priorities have been identified and research projects may focus on any **one** of the:

- Metabolic diseases
- Anti-Microbial Resistance
- Brain Health
- Respiratory Diseases

Cancer biology is not included in the 2020 project round as a cancer biology project was funded under this partnership in 2019.

Research projects may consider one of the following approaches but are not limited to:

- Development of novel methods for data collection, characterisation and analysis;
- Development of novel or personalized approaches to prevention, diagnosis and management;

- Understanding the basis and pathophysiological mechanisms contributing to the health priority issue;
- Reducing the impact of common risk factors;
- Traditional medicines in treatment.

It is anticipated that research collaborators will demonstrate the potential benefit to New Zealand from the proposed international partnership. This may, in part, be through access to research infrastructure, such as datasets, equipment and technologies, intellectual property and expertise, but is also expected to be through specific, measurable, time-bound outcomes that will benefit New Zealand.

3. Characteristics of the research project

The research proposal needs to provide information on:

- The appropriateness, soundness and rigour of the study methodology and design, while allowing for solutions to be developed in a flexible manner.
- How the proposed research builds on existing relationships and strengthens existing collaborations. It is anticipated that by building on existing relationships, New Zealand scientists will be best placed to access international expertise, markets, global knowledge and research facilities.
- Distinct supplementary research activities, such as how collaboration will enhance each side's technological advantages and complement each other and a clear division of work. This will enable New Zealand scientists to better align with their Chinese collaborators and merge the collaboration into a more significant and integrated work programme.
- A clear process for deploying research outcomes (taking into consideration that any actual deployment/commercialisation would be outside the term of the research contract). Activities that could support future efforts to derive economic benefit(s) and be conducted within the research timeframe may include workshops, science exchange and key networking activities.
- How activities contribute to the long-term aim of generating health and economic benefit to New Zealand.

Research grant funding will only be used to support the costs associated with New Zealand-based researchers employed by a New Zealand host institution.

4. Eligibility criteria

For a proposal to be assessed under this HRC funding round, it must meet the eligibility criteria set out below. Proposals that the HRC determines do not meet these criteria will be declined for funding on eligibility grounds.

- The proposal must be made by a New Zealand-based research organisation or a New Zealand-based legal entity representing a New Zealand-based research organisation.
- The First Named Investigator must be employed by a New Zealand-based research organisation, or a New Zealand-based legal entity representing a New Zealand-based research organisation.

- The applicants must have identified suitable research collaborators from a leading research organisation(s) based in China, which is an NSFC registered institution (http://isisn.nsf.gov.cn/egrantindex/funcindex/orgsearch-list?locale=zh_CN).
- The proposal must be uploaded on time via the HRC Gateway Portal and meet the administrative requirements of HRC.
- Applicants must have submitted a registration on HRC Gateway.

Applicants should also be familiar with the HRC Rules when applying.

5. Funding

The funding requested from the HRC may be up to a maximum of \$700,000 (exclusive of GST). The duration of the project may be up to 3 years. It is anticipated that a decision on funding will be made in October 2020 and funding will be available for a late 2020 start date. Applicants will need to give consideration to this when outlining research timelines. The anticipated outcome date is tentative as delays to the outcome announcement may be unavoidable. Where applications are of equal scientific merit, the assessing committee may also consider the relative 'value for money' of the applications.

6. Research team

The research team will require demonstrated expertise in undertaking health research. New Zealand applicants should have Chinese research partners eligible for the matching NSFC funding. Only research proposals with confirmed submission of the counterpart application to NSFC will be considered. Research teams will collectively require the skills appropriate to undertake the research proposed and this should be clearly outlined in the application.

7. Project deliverables

A final report including comment, and providing evidence, of:

- the value of the project in building existing relationships and strengthening existing collaborations
- the value of the project in leading to economic and health outcomes e.g. commercialization

In addition to research deliverables, regular progress reports will also be required for the project, via HRC Gateway. These reports detail progress of the project and highlight any risks to its progress. Once a funding decision has been confirmed, the HRC will confirm the reporting dates in the relevant research contract.

8. Proposal requirements

Clear and coherently written applications are essential in allowing the Assessing Committee to effectively read and assess applications submitted to this RFP.

Applicants will need to outline how their proposal addresses the scope of the RFP and provide a clear justification for the proposed approach along with a description of

the project team's ability to deliver the specific components of the study. Applicants will also need to provide a fully costed budget.

Proposals must demonstrate the following:

- The proposal represents high-quality science, is scoped appropriately and is relevant to the objectives of this RFP.
- Applications must be from teams with a range of skills and experience. An outline of the project management and organisational support available to the project should be included, with appropriate project management FTE included in the budget as applicable.
- The project team's capacity and skills to work effectively with a range of stakeholders and key participants at the different stages of the study.
- Plans for study findings to be disseminated nationally via tailored approaches to a broad range of relevant audiences in order to maximise the utility of the research. Dissemination should also include publication in international, peer-reviewed journals.
- The proposed study is clearly achievable within the specified timeframe. The funding partners see the delivery of this research contributing to a wider programme of work. Therefore time is of the essence. A detailed project management plan for all stages of the project should be included with clear and unambiguous milestones and associated timeframes for achieving the desired outcomes. *The likelihood that the proposed study will be successfully completed within the stated timeframe will be specifically assessed. Please also carefully consider the start date included in the application, as applicants will be held to what was stated.* Applicants should take into account the timeframe for obtaining ethical approval (if appropriate) and should ensure that this does not delay the start of the project.
- The budget is appropriate for the proposed study.

9. Application procedure

All application forms and guidelines are available via [HRC Gateway](#), the HRC's online application system. The **2020 HRC-NSFC Biomedical Collaboration Fund Project Application Guidelines** provide full details on the application process summarised below.

Step 1: Registration

Applicants are required to submit a Registration via [HRC Gateway](#) by **1:00pm, Wednesday 13 May 2020**. This web-based form signals the intent of the applicant to submit a full application. The project title, all named investigators, host organisation and lay summary will be required. These details should be similar to those in the full application although minor adjustments are allowed.

HRC Gateway will forward the submitted Registration to the applicant's host Research Office, who will need to approve the Registration and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices, HRC Gateway will forward the Registration to the HRC.

All named investigators must have an HRC Gateway account (*with an updated profile*), to be able to be included in an application. Creating an HRC Gateway account is easy and can be done by clicking on 'New user – sign up for HRC Gateway' on the HRC Gateway homepage (gateway.hrc.govt.nz/).

Step 2: Full Application

Applicants are then required to complete a full application. Full applications should be submitted via HRC Gateway by **1:00pm, Wednesday 27 May 2020**.

Applicants should use the **2020 HRC-NSFC Project Application Form, 2020 HRC-NSFC Budget Form**, and **New Zealand Standard CV template**.

HRC Gateway will forward the submitted full application to the applicant's host Research Office or designated research manager who will need to approve the full application and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices or a research manager, HRC Gateway will forward the full application directly to the HRC.

HRC Gateway will create a PDF of the complete full application after submission. Applicants should print two hard copies of this PDF and send to the HRC to arrive by **5:00pm, Wednesday 3 June 2020**.

Applicants must meet the deadlines above for their proposal to be eligible. Full applications will be screened against the eligibility screening criteria (outlined on page 3). Applications which do not meet the criteria will not proceed to full assessment. Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria will be informed prior to peer review commencing.

Applicants will have the opportunity to submit a rebuttal in response to the reviewer comments. The Assessing Committee for this initiative will review the full applications, peer review reports and applicant rebuttal and will make funding recommendations to the HRC who will then make a final funding decision together with NSFC.

10. Stream two: emerging researcher requirements

These grants provide research funds to support emerging researchers who are seeking to establish independent careers whilst simultaneously developing collaborative linkages with China based collaborators. This arrangement will extend opportunities for New Zealand's scientists to engage with researchers and facilities in China in areas of key concern for New Zealand. It will particularly focus on ensuring New Zealand's future leaders are connected to leaders, and future leaders, in China, and to grow successful, sustainable research collaborations.

The aim of this funding opportunity is to develop the next generation of researchers and support the building of strong international collaborative relationships so in the future researchers funded through this grant will be in a stronger position to apply for further funding initiatives.

An emerging researcher is: "Someone who is at the beginning of their research career in health with a clear development path and is working in a strongly supportive research environment".

For the collaborative component of this opportunity it is expected that the researcher will develop a collaboration, with this fund enabling travel and research expenses. It is expected the host institution in China will be supportive of the collaboration and facilitate the exchange by agreeing to host the researcher. Due diligence will be carried out by the HRC and NSFC to ensure the appropriateness of the China-based research institute.

The proposed collaboration should be additional to the researcher's current activities,

and whilst the opportunity must be new, it may be based on relationships that have already been developed. Successful applications will present a vision for how the enabling grant may be used to develop longer-term, sustainable international collaborations.

Research proposals should seek to investigate one of the five priority areas:

- Cancer biology
- Metabolic diseases
- Anti-Microbial Resistance
- Brain Health
- Respiratory Diseases

The applicant will undertake overall responsibility for the work to be completed. These contracts do not include salary for recipients, who will require salary support from elsewhere. Other academics, professional supervisors or senior researchers may be included as Named Investigators on a time-only basis. Applicants should detail the extent to which this grant will support them as independent researchers and how it will enable a step change in their career. The applicants need to describe how the grant will support the development of a new research programme. Note that the award can be seen as 'seeding' funding for the applicant's future research.

11. Eligibility criteria

Applicants are eligible if they:

- have not previously held a competitive research grant as a first Named Investigator for research expenses of \geq \$105,000 from any source at the time of assessment (including institutional or internal funding). Scholarship and fellowship stipends are not included, provided the expenses component of such awards does not exceed the \$105,000 expenses threshold. Applicants are required to provide the amount of research expenses of their previous awards in this application.
- no more than 6 years from attaining a most recent postgraduate degree, but this period could be greater for parental leave, caring responsibilities, career breaks, ill health or other justified reasons. Eligibility will be counted from the date of conferment. HRC may request evidence of this date to confirm eligibility, if required.
- are not studying for a PhD degree.
- justify how they fit the definition of emerging researcher as defined above. The HRC reserves the right to accept the assessment of the assessing committee.

There is a clear distinction between eligibility, defined above, and suitability. Applicants are required to clearly state their suitability in Section 2B: Applicant. The committee's assessment that an applicant is not suitable because, for example, that applicant is already established in an independent research pathway, will be accepted by the HRC Council as final.

Applicants should also be familiar with the HRC Rules when applying

12. Budget

The funding requested from the HRC may be up to a maximum of \$100,000 (exclusive of GST). The duration of the project may be up to 2 years.

It is anticipated that a decision on funding will be made in October 2020 and funding will be available for a late 2020 start date. Applicants will need to give consideration to this when outlining research timelines. The anticipated outcome date is tentative as delays to the outcome announcement may be unavoidable.

Where applications are of equal scientific merit, the assessing committee may also consider the relative 'value for money' of the applications.

13. Project deliverables

It is anticipated that deliverables for this initiative will include meaningful and detailed six-monthly progress reports; an HRC end of contract report, and a final deliverable report detailing the results of the complete programme of work and the details of the on-going collaboration.

14. Application procedure

All application forms and guidelines are available via [HRC Gateway](#), the HRC's online application system. **The 2020 HRC-NSFC Biomedical Collaboration Fund Emerging Researcher Application Guidelines** provide full details on the application process summarised below.

Step 1: Registration

Applicants are required to submit a Registration via [HRC Gateway](#) by **1:00pm, Wednesday 13 May 2020**. This web-based form signals the intent of the applicant to submit a full application. The project title, all named investigators, host organisation and lay summary will be required. These details should be similar to those in the full application although minor adjustments are allowed.

HRC Gateway will forward the submitted Registration to the applicant's host Research Office, who will need to approve the Registration and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices, HRC Gateway will forward the Registration to the HRC.

All named investigators must have an HRC Gateway account (*with an updated profile*), to be able to be included in an application. Creating an HRC Gateway account is easy and can be done by clicking on 'New user – sign up for HRC Gateway' on the HRC Gateway homepage (gateway.hrc.govt.nz/).

Step 2: Full Application

Applicants are then required to complete a full application. Full applications should be submitted via HRC Gateway by **1:00pm, Wednesday 27 May 2020**.

Applicants should use the **2020 HRC-NSFC Emerging Researcher Application Form**, **2020 HRC-NSFC Budget Form**, and **New Zealand Standard CV template**.

HRC Gateway will forward the submitted full application to the applicant's host Research Office or designated research manager who will need to approve the full application and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices or a research manager, HRC Gateway will forward the full application directly to the HRC.

HRC Gateway will create a PDF of the complete full application after submission. Applicants should print two hard copies of this PDF and send to the HRC to arrive by **5:00pm, Wednesday 3 June 2020**.

Applicants must meet the deadlines above for their proposal to be eligible.

15. Assessment procedure

The assessment procedure for projects and emerging researcher grants is summarised below.

Step 1: Peer Review

Full applications will be assessed through an external peer review process managed by the HRC. This involves comprehensive peer review by independent national and international experts.

Step 2: Applicant Rebuttal

Applicants are given the opportunity to view the peer review reports for their application and provide a rebuttal to the comments made. This is not an opportunity to rewrite major sections of a proposal, but rather the opportunity to respond to specific peer reviewer comments, to answer questions raised by the peer reviewer, or to clarify an issue for the Assessing Committee.

Step 3: Assessing Committee

An independent Assessing Committee will assess applications, taking into consideration the peer review reports and applicant rebuttal. The assessment criteria are outlined in the document ***2020 HRC-NSFC Biomedical Collaboration Fund RFP Assessment Criteria*** available on HRC Gateway. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these criteria.

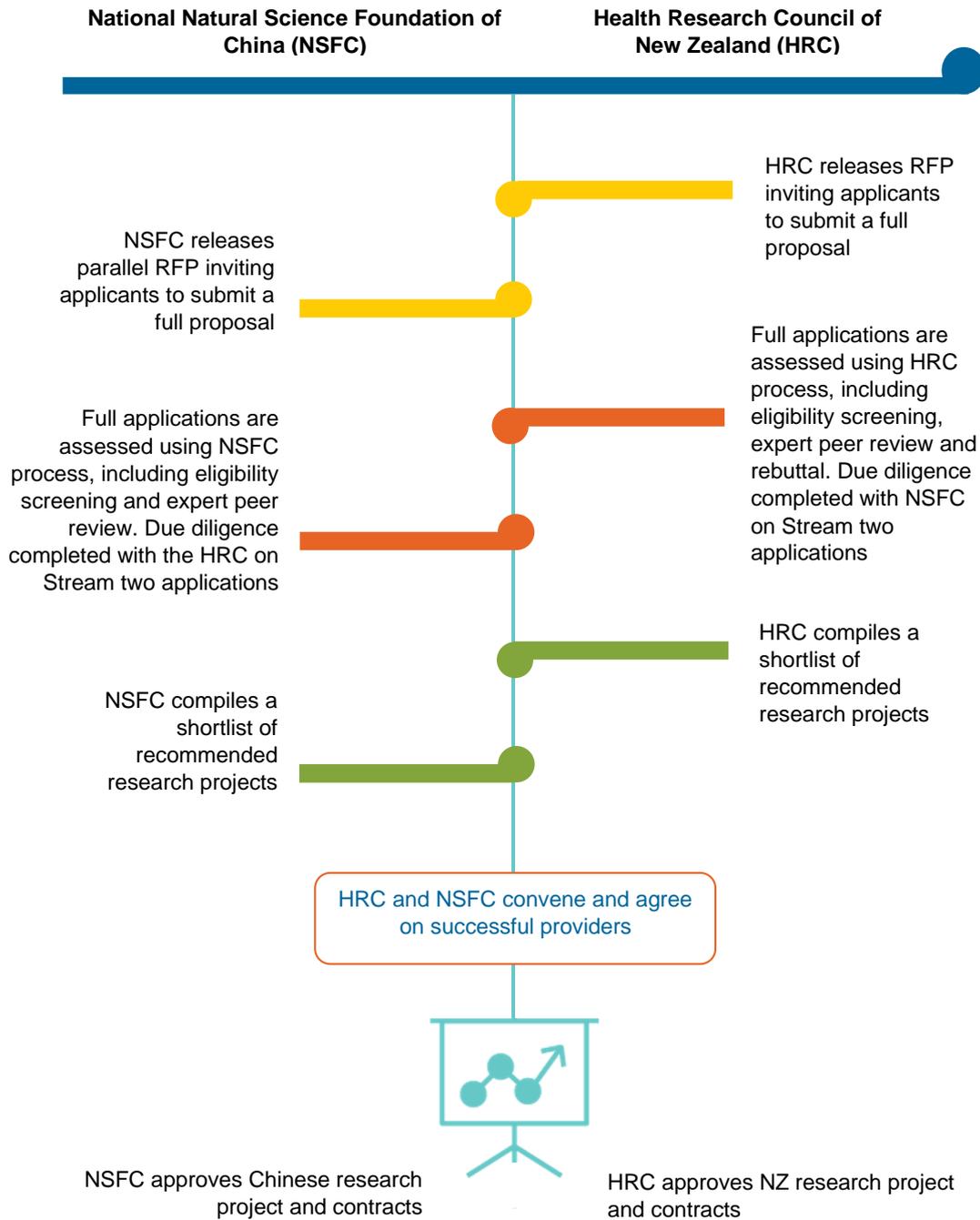
Depending on the number of full applications, a triage process may be utilised to determine which applications will be discussed in full at the Assessing Committee meeting. This process would involve committee members scoring applications in advance of the meeting using the assessment criteria to yield a ranked list. The lowest-ranked applications based on the pre-scores would then be triaged and not discussed at the meeting.

The Assessing Committee will make recommendations for funding, to be considered and approved by the HRC and NSFC. Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions in October 2020.

Key actions and dates for this initiative:

Action	Date
Registration due (via HRC Gateway)	1pm, Wednesday 13 May 2020
Full application due (via HRC Gateway)	1pm, Wednesday 27 May 2020
Full application (hard copies) due	5pm, Wednesday 3 June 2020
External peer review	June-July
Applicant rebuttal opens	8am, Friday 31 July 2020
Applicant rebuttal due	1pm, Thursday 13 August 2020
Applicants notified of outcome	October 2020

Diagram 1: Application and assessment process for HRC-NSFC Biomedical Collaboration Fund



16. General notes

Decision Advice

No legal obligations will arise between the funding partners and applicants for this RFP until such time as the HRC enters into a contract with the successful applicant.

Privacy Provisions

In the event that an application is successful, the HRC reserves the right to release applicants' names, details of the host institution/company, contact details (work phone or email), contract title and funding awarded for public interest purposes and to meet the statutory requirements of the Health Research Council of New Zealand Act 1990.

HRC Partnership Programme

This RFP is a component of the HRC's Partnership Programme, through which the HRC forms strategic partnerships with funders and stakeholders to target resources towards developing the evidence-base in key areas of need and strengthen research links internationally. The HRC's processes ensure that the track record of the research team, the scientific merit and the design and methods of the successful proposal are most likely to deliver the highest quality of evidence.

Mailing Address

Printed hard copies of applications should be sent to the Health Research Council's office as shown below:

Mailing Address:

Health Research Council of New Zealand
PO Box 5541, Victoria Street West
AUCKLAND 1142
Attn: Sia Cocker

Physical/Courier Address:

Health Research Council of New Zealand
Level 3, 110 Stanley Street
AUCKLAND
Attn: Sia Cocker

Enquiries

All enquiries related to this Request for Proposals should be directed to Fiona Kenning, Research Investment Manager – International, Research Partnerships (fkennig@hrc.govt.nz or 09 3035208).