

# Request for Proposals



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

**hrc** nz Health Research Council  
of New Zealand  
Te Kaunihira Rangahau Hauora o Aotearoa

May 2024

## **2024 NZ-China Biomedical Research Alliance RFP**

### **Overview**

This research initiative aims to support the development of research collaborations between New Zealand researchers and Chinese colleagues. It is supported through the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment's (MBIE) Catalyst Fund: Strategic. The Health Research Council (HRC) is responsible for administering the Catalyst Fund: Strategic investment with a focus on biomedical research to support the development of collaborative research relationships that demonstrate long-term health and economic benefits to New Zealand.

The HRC invites applications for funding of up to \$405,000 (fully costed, exclusive of GST) and duration of up to 3 years. The HRC anticipates funding up to two projects.

The Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) and the HRC, together with MBIE, are jointly responsible for the funding decisions. HRC funding will support the successful New Zealand project team, and MoST's funding will support the Chinese project team in the same collaboration. This Request for Proposals (RFP) applies only to the New Zealand application process, and Chinese researchers must consult with MoST regarding their own separate application requirements and process.

It is anticipated that funding for up to two projects will be available for a March 2025 start date (to be confirmed). There may be unavoidable delays to the funding announcement and the start date of the research project.

The HRC's strong focus on peer review and contestability will ensure successful applicants deliver the highest quality of evidence.

## 1. Background

This initiative is supported through the Catalyst Fund and is designed to support strategic research and large-scale pre-research collaborations with leading overseas partners. Funded activities will demonstrate a clear potential impact for New Zealand by challenging and transforming the economy; strengthening society; protecting the environment; and advancing health equity with consideration to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and diverse communities.

Under this overarching framework, the Catalyst Fund: Strategic specifically invests in targeted areas. Its objectives are to:

- Leverage international research and infrastructure capabilities in areas posing significant science-based challenges to New Zealand and our international partners; and
- Profile New Zealand science and innovation and our ability to contribute to global science challenges.

It is also expected that Catalyst: Strategic will support relevant activities that contribute to unlocking the innovation potential of Māori knowledge, resources, and people for the benefit of New Zealand, as outlined in MBIE's Vision Mātauranga policy framework.

For collaboration with China, this investment will focus on building knowledge and technologies to prevent, diagnose, and manage human health and disease.

## 2. Funding

The funding requested from the HRC may be up to a maximum of \$405,000 (exclusive of GST).

The duration of the project may be up to 3 years.

It is anticipated that an announcement about the successful funding recipient/s will be made in early 2025 with funding available for a March 2025 start date. Applicants will need to consider this when outlining research timelines. The anticipated outcome date is tentative; delays to the outcome announcement may be unavoidable.

Applicants should note that if competing proposals are equal in terms of their scientific value, the funding partners will consider best value for money offered by each proposal.

## 3. Proposal requirements

### Research objectives

This grant will create opportunities for New Zealand scientists to identify and harness opportunities through collaborations with Chinese researchers. Applicants to the scheme will conduct health research using existing collaborations and identify opportunities for deploying research outcomes into the marketplace. Investment will focus on building knowledge and technologies to prevent, diagnose, and manage diseases.

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.

The following five research areas have been identified:

- development of novel methods for data collection, characterisation and analysis
- development of novel or personalised approaches to disease prevention diagnosis and management
- understanding the basis and pathophysiological mechanisms contributing to disease
- reducing the impact of common risk factors for disease
- traditional medicines in treatment of disease.

Proposals are not limited to these areas; however, applicants are encouraged to justify their proposed research.

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. However, it is also expected to be through specific, measurable, time-bound outcomes that will benefit New Zealand.

### **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, how collaboration will enhance each sides technological advantages and complement each other and a clear division of work, allowing 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 implementing research outcomes (taking into consideration that any actual implementation/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 advancing health equity, generating health and economic benefit to New Zealand.
- Researchers are encouraged to consider how their project may be required to adapt to potential changes in environment and/or work situations. It is recommended that applicants describe how they will mitigate these potential changes as part of their proposals.

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

### **Eligibility criteria**

For a proposal to be assessed under this Catalyst: Strategic funding round, it must meet the following eligibility criteria. Registrations that the HRC determines do not meet these criteria will be declined for funding on eligibility grounds.

- The registration 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 China research organisation(s).
- Applicants must submit a registration.

Applicants should also be familiar with the *HRC Rules* document when applying. The full proposal must be uploaded on time via the HRC Gateway portal and meet the administrative requirements of the HRC.

#### 4. Project deliverables

Regular progress reports will be required for the project. 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.

#### 5. Application procedure

All forms and guidelines are available via HRC Gateway.

##### Step 1: Registration

Applicants are required to submit a registration via [HRC Gateway](#) by **1pm, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**. 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 (<https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/>).

Registrations will be screened against the eligibility screening criteria outlined above. Applications that do not meet the criteria will not proceed to full proposal submission. Ineligible applicants will be notified.

##### Step 2: Full application

Applicants must complete a full application using the **2024 NZ-China Biomedical Research Alliance Full Application Form** and submit via HRC Gateway by **1pm, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024**.

Please refer to the **2024 NZ–China Biomedical Research Alliance Full Application Guidelines** for details of these processes. These guidelines provide information on what is required of applicants in each section of the application form.

## **6. Assessment procedure**

### **Step 1: Peer review**

The scientific integrity of 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/response**

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 an opportunity to respond to specific reviewer comments, to answer questions raised by the reviewer, or to clarify an issue so that your proposal may be viewed as equitably as possible by 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 **2024 NZ-China Biomedical Research Alliance RFP Application Guidelines** outlines the assessment criteria. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these criteria.

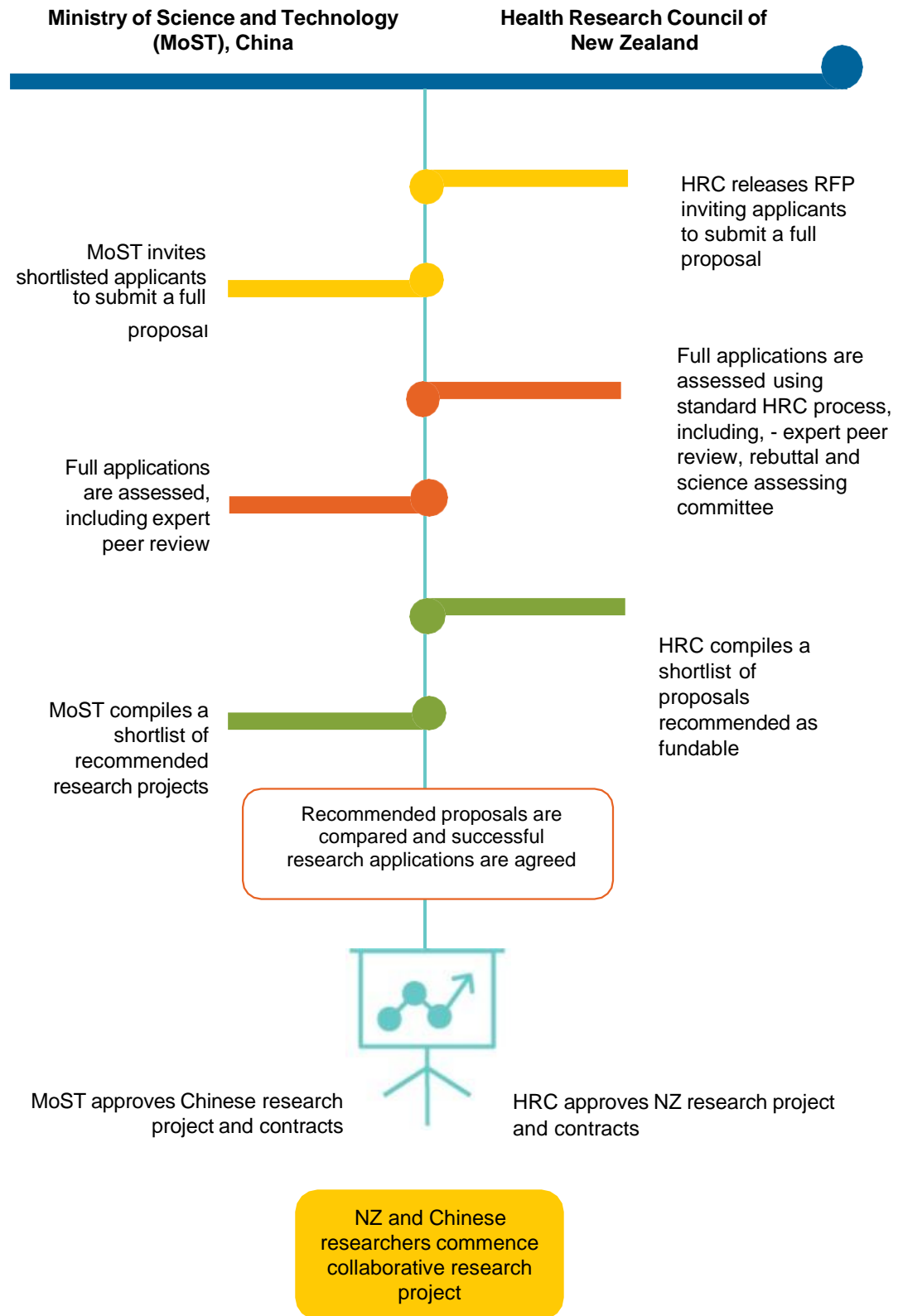
Depending on the number of full applications, a triage process may be used to determine which applications will be discussed in full at the Assessing Committee meeting. This process would involve committee members scoring applications in advance of the meeting using the assessment criteria to yield a 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, MBIE and MoST. Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions in early 2025. Due to the international nature of this round, there may be unavoidable delays to the final funding announcement.

## 7. Key actions and dates for this initiative:

Action	Date
Registration due (via HRC Gateway)	Thursday 20 June 2024 1pm
Full application due (via HRC Gateway)	Thursday 18 July 2024 1pm
External peer review	August – September 2024
Applicant rebuttal opens	Wednesday 2 October 2024 1pm
Applicant rebuttal due	Tuesday 15 October 2024 1pm
Applicants notified of outcome	Early 2025 (TBC)

**Diagram 1: Application and assessment process for 2024 NZ-China Biomedical Research Alliance**



## **8. General notes**

### **Decision advice**

Unless specifically stated in this RFP, 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**

If 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*.

### **Enquiries**

All enquiries related to this Request for Proposals should be directed to Tracey Gardiner, Investment Process Coordinator ([tgardiner@hrc.govt.nz](mailto:tgardiner@hrc.govt.nz)).