



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

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

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2024 PEER REVIEW MANUAL

**for research applications to the
Health Research Council of New Zealand**



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1. Purpose of Peer Review Manual

The Peer Review Manual focuses on the overarching principles, roles, and considerations relating to the HRC peer review process. Grant-specific information including assessment processes, eligibility criteria, and assessment criteria are available in the application guidelines for each award type.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the assessment processes described in the application guidelines for the relevant grant type that they are applying to.

Refer to the CDA Peer Review Manual for assessment processes for career development awards.

If extenuating circumstances necessitate changes to the information described in this document, then any such changes will be communicated via standard HRC mechanisms.

2. The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC)

The HRC, established under the Health Research Council Act 1990, is the Crown Entity responsible for the management of the Government's investment in public good health research. The Act provides for the appointment of statutory research committees (biomedical, BRC; public health, PHRC; Māori health, MHC) to advise the Council on the assignment of funds for health research. In addition, the Pacific Health Research Committee, which is a standing committee of Council, provides advice to Council regarding Pacific health research. Assessing committees (AC) are appointed by the research committees to review health research proposals for funding through a variety of grant types.

The HRC funds a portfolio of health research relevant to Government goals and to the needs of the health sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. The HRC funding of health research occurs primarily through an annual funding round to identify and support high quality research. Funding is also provided through a Connecting for Impact fund, which supports specific research initiatives, career development awards, and targeted Māori and Pacific health research funding.

3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

As a Crown Agent and steward of government funds, the HRC has a special responsibility to ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi¹ is embedded throughout our funding system and investment processes. The HRC is committed to:

- supporting research that upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi by reflecting Te Tiriti principles (Tino Rangatiratanga, Equity, Active Protection, Options, and Partnership) in practice.
- Supporting and encouraging research that advances Māori health.
- Implementing Te Tiriti principles in HRC investment processes.
- Implementing processes to promote fairness and minimise bias.

¹ Te Tiriti o Waitangi (known in English as the Treaty of Waitangi) is an agreement signed in 1840 between Māori and the British Crown.

4. The New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework

The New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework (the HRPF) was launched in December 2019, setting out national priorities for health research. The HRPF is a guide for all government-funded health research, helping to coordinate research efforts across the sector to focus resources on research that will bring the greatest benefits in health and wellbeing for Aotearoa New Zealand.

The HRC has begun work to ensure that all our investment opportunities and processes are aligned with those actions for research funders outlined in the HRPF. We are:

- Considering how our existing investment, including the structure and intent of funding opportunities, aligns with the research and infrastructure aims within each Domain to identify opportunities to enhance what we support.
- Looking at how our current processes reflect the Health Research Attributes set by the HRPF, which define how health research should be conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand and the responsibilities for funders, research providers, and research teams.

What's changing and when?

We expect that our review will result in important changes to our funding opportunities and processes and in new, exciting initiatives for health researchers. We have started introducing small changes in the HRC's funding opportunities to reflect the HRPF. These will continue to be set out clearly in the application guidelines for applicable funding opportunities, which will be published on HRC Gateway as they become available.

For more significant changes affecting applicants, we will ensure clear communication so that the sector can prepare. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the HRC's fortnightly e-newsletter *Update*.

What can researchers do to prepare?

The New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework is a guide as to what the HRC is looking for when we fund research. We encourage researchers to consider the HRPF when planning their research for funding applications.

Please consult the relevant application guidelines available on HRC Gateway for advice and instructions for each of the HRC's funding opportunities, including the applicability of the HRPF for that funding opportunity (if relevant).

For more information refer to the New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework available [here](#).

5. Acknowledgements

The HRC acknowledges the time, effort, and valuable contribution committee members and external reviewers make to its assessment processes.

6. Integrity of peer review

6.1 Disclosures and conflicts of interest

A goal in the HRC mission of "benefiting New Zealand through health research" is to invest in research that meets New Zealand health needs and research that has a strong pathway to

impact. Peer review by external reviewers and assessing committees (AC) are part of this process.

The HRC Management of Interest Policy governs Council members, committee members, staff, contractors, and consultants. The policy is further applicable to all AC members and reviewers. A conflict of interest arises when an individual has an interest which conflicts (or might be perceived to conflict) with the interests of the HRC as a Crown Entity, such as situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, professional judgement in objectively assessing research proposals. In managing a conflict of interest, it is important to consider actual conflicts and the appearance of conflict.

The HRC provides external reviewers and AC members with guidelines regarding conflicts of interest management, to assist in the identification and declaration of potential conflicts of interest and to help evaluate the potential impact of the conflict on the peer-review process. It is difficult to prescribe a comprehensive set of rules on interest as individuals are best able to judge their duties, links, and potential interest in a particular circumstance. The key question to ask when considering whether an interest might create a conflict is whether or not “the interest creates an incentive to act in a way which may not be in the best interests of the HRC, the research, or the researcher(s).”

In order to minimise potential conflicts of interest, the following specific HRC guidance for AC membership has been developed:

- Anyone who is a **first named investigator** or a **named investigator** on an application under consideration in that round should not sit on the AC that is assessing their application, but they may sit on or chair another AC.
- A Programme named investigator cannot be a committee reviewer (CR) on a competing Programme application.
- HRC Council members, who chair research committees, cannot serve on an AC.

6.2 Declaration of conflict of interest

Assessing committee members and external reviewers must declare a potential conflict of interest if they:

- are a named investigator on any application in the funding round
- are from the same immediate department, institution or company as the applicant(s)
- have direct involvement in the research proposal being discussed
- have collaborated, published or been a co-applicant with the applicant(s), within the last five years
- have been involved in any National Science Challenge-funded studies or associated activities with the applicant(s)
- have been a student or supervisor of the applicant(s) within the last 10 years
- are a close personal friend or relative of the applicant(s)
- have had long-standing scientific or personal differences with the applicant(s)
- are in a position to gain or lose financially from the outcome of the application
- have direct involvement in a competing application in the current funding round
- for whatever reason, feel that they cannot provide an objective review of the application.

6.3 Evaluation of interest

External reviewers may exclude themselves from the assessment process when they recognise a potential significant conflict of interest by opting out when initially contacted by an HRC team member, or on accessing preliminary details of the application on the HRC Gateway. When an external reviewer does not recognise or declare a conflict of interest, but the potential conflict is

later detected, the level of conflict will be determined and managed according to the guidelines in this section.

Declarations of conflicts of interest for assessing committee members should be made as soon as possible to allow evaluation of the conflict and an appropriate outcome or resolution to be achieved. The HRC and the AC chair are responsible for raising any potential conflict of interest issues, resolving any areas of uncertainty, and working with the AC in making final decisions in managing potential conflicts of interest. Potential conflicts of interest are discussed with the AC as a whole; the member concerned may be asked to leave the meeting during this discussion. Following this discussion, one of the following agreed actions is taken:

Level 1	No action is necessary.
Level 2	The AC member may be present due to their unique knowledge of the research area. They may be asked direct questions relating to the score criteria by other committee members, but they will not participate in general discussion and they will not score the application. Reviewer reports will be managed at the discretion of the research investment manager and AC chair.
Level 3	The reviewer report must not be considered, or the AC member must not be present during discussion and scoring of the research proposal.

All declared conflicts should be recorded in the notes of the relevant meetings including the action taken.

Where a potential conflict of interest, such as a recent co-authored publication, arises from a person's technical expertise, e.g. biostatistics or other limited involvement, this may be considered a minor conflict if the person was/is acting in a capacity similar to that of a consultant. If the association extends to the person being considered an integral member of the research team, then this is likely to be considered a strong conflict.

In determining conflicts of interest with collaborators, who are not named investigators but contribute in other ways to a proposal, the HRC will consider the declaration in line with our conflict of interest policy. In evaluating the conflict, and determining the appropriate action, the specific involvement of the collaborating individual or organisation will be considered.

An individual who is concerned about another member's potential or actual conflict of interest should raise the issue with the chair or HRC, and measures to alleviate those concerns will be taken.

6.4 Levels of peer review

The HRC applies several levels of peer review to applications. There are slight modifications for each type of proposal, but the objective remains to minimise the influence of individual conflicts of interest by using several committees, of different membership, to decide the progress of each application. An individual is restricted in the number of roles that they could have during a funding round. For example, Council members do not serve on assessing committees. The HRC research committees provide representatives to chair assessing committees and advise in improving assessment processes.

Applications to the HRC can be assessed through several steps including an expression of interest assessing committee meeting, a review of full applications by external reviewers, a full stage assessing committee meeting, and review by the Grant Approval Committee (GAC). All HRC funding is approved by the HRC Council. For full details of assessment processes, please refer to the guidelines for each grant type.

Where the opportunity exists to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and/or quality of the HRC funding processes in support of quality improvement and/or adding to the evidence base for research funding, the HRC may choose to design and conduct a study to support this.

6.5 Financial interest

For the purposes of HRC processes, a financial interest is anything of economic value, including relationships with entities outside the research host institution. Examples of financial interests include positions such as consultant, director, officer, partner or manager of an entity (whether paid or unpaid); salaries; consulting income; honoraria; gifts; loans and travel payments.

A financial conflict of interest may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, the individual's professional judgment in conducting, assessing or reporting research.

Applicants must disclose financial interests arising from the sponsorship of the research when any of the sponsors of the activity undertaken as part of the proposed research is a non-governmental entity.

6.6 Confidentiality and retention of applications

All participants in HRC peer review processes, in agreeing to take part, are required to keep specific details of each application assessment confidential.

The following guidance for committee members is to maintain confidentiality and protect the integrity of the peer review process:

- Applications and confidential meeting materials must not be shared with anyone who has not been invited by the HRC to participate in the assessing committee. Committee members may seek generic advice from those outside of the peer review process, but the specific content of an application must never be revealed.
- Committee discussions, decisions and scoring for applications must remain confidential at all times. Any comments on applications are restricted to committee discussion and cannot continue during breaks or outside of the meeting.
- Electronic and paper materials must be destroyed at the conclusion of the assessing committee meeting.
- Committee members are encouraged to note their service on an HRC committee in CVs or other material **but must not reveal the specific committee name**. The HRC publishes a list of AC members each year, but members are not listed by committee. Members must not disclose the names of other members associated with a specific committee or the names of external reviewers associated with a specific application.

The following guidance for external reviewers is to maintain confidentiality and protect the integrity of the peer review process:

- Applications and confidential links to the HRC Gateway system must not be shared with anyone. External reviewers are expected to provide comments and questions on an application that are focused on the area of the proposal that is most directly aligned with their expertise.
- Reviewers may seek generic advice from those outside of the peer review process, but the specific content of an application must never be revealed.
- External reviewer reports are anonymised for applicant response, but not for the AC.
- Electronic and paper materials must be destroyed once external reviewers have completed their review.

Any suspected breaches in confidentiality should be immediately reported to the HRC. The HRC will take appropriate steps to investigate and manage any suspected breach.

A committee chair may keep copies of research proposals and committee meeting notes for a period of three months following the award of new HRC research contracts. This is to ensure that any queries regarding the outcome of funding results can be clarified. The primary committee reviewer (CR1) of an application may retain notes to complete appropriate review summaries for applicant feedback. Due to the risk of sensitive or confidential information being lost, it is preferred that applications are stored as electronic files in a secure system instead of paper copies that are easily mislaid.

6.7 A note on Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI can use prompts or questions to generate text or images that closely resemble human-created content. These tools work by matching user prompts to patterns in training data and use probability to 'fill in the blanks'. ChatGPT is the most well-known example of a Generative AI.²

Entering information from an application into generative AI tools as part of undertaking external peer review would be in breach of HRC confidentiality policy (as defined in the Confidentiality section above).

In addition to breaching confidentiality requirements, the use of generative AI to inform peer review would be considered to compromise the integrity of the HRC's peer review process, through the introduction of biases, inappropriate comments, generic statements, and/or restatements of the application.

If the HRC identifies that an External Peer Reviewer has used Generative AI in the completion of their review, appropriate action will be determined and managed by HRC staff, and the report will not be used in the assessment process.

6.8 Minimising bias

In addition to managing conflicts of interest related to individuals, the HRC continually seeks to minimise the impact of unfair and unreasonable bias related to gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or any other grounds prohibited by the Human Rights Act, 1993. In addition, the HRC seeks to minimise the impact of biases more specific to the health and research sectors, such as those related to discipline, methodological choices, or research background. This is not an exhaustive list; the HRC acknowledges there are numerous biases that can unfairly influence assessment, and that these can intersect and have a cumulative negative impact.

While a peer review process inherently relies on subjective assessment, the HRC aims to minimise the impact of various biases by ensuring that the assessment of each application is informed by experts with a diverse range of perspectives as well as subject matter knowledge.

The HRC actively manages committee composition to minimise potential impacts of bias and has steps in place to reduce the influence of bias during assessing committee meetings. For example, committee members are asked to watch a training video about bias, and this is discussed at the start of each meeting. Committee chairs, supported by HRC staff, are briefed to manage discussions to ensure that the knowledge contributed by each member is respected.

An assessing committee meeting code of conduct is presented to the committee at the start of the meeting and members are asked to adhere to the code and keep it front of mind throughout the meeting process). The HRC has mechanisms in place to monitor for expression of biases in

² Definition from: <https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/technology-and-architecture/interim-generative-ai-guidance-for-the-public-service/what-is-generative-ai/>

reviews and discussion, and to intervene to minimise impact and recurrence, which we will continue to improve.

HRC Assessing Committee Code of Conduct

As an organisation, the HRC aims to ensure that:

- diversity, equity, safety, and inclusiveness are embedded in our assessment processes, and that diverse perspectives are respected and valued
- committee members are not placed in unsafe positions through either exposure to, or negative impact from, discriminatory, biased or disrespectful comments
- applicants and applications are assessed objectively, constructively and respectfully
- the committee meeting process is undertaken according to the principles of HRC assessment:
 - Conflicts of interests managed appropriately in line with best practice and HRC policy
 - Confidentiality maintained
 - Fair and balanced discussion/scoring
 - “Round table” expertise and discussion
 - Impartial and non-discriminatory decision making

All discrimination and biased assessment is a detriment to the quality of our assessment process, and as a result to the potential impact of our research funding

Embedding diversity, equity, safety, and inclusiveness in HRC assessment processes is a critical step in ensuring that we fund high-quality, high-impact research that improves health equity within Aotearoa New Zealand.

6.9 False or misleading information

Once submitted to the HRC, a funding application is considered final and no changes will be permitted, although it may be withdrawn. The application is the primary source of information available for assessment. As such, it must contain all the information necessary for AC assessment without the need for further written explanation or reference to additional documentation at the meeting. All details in the application, particularly concerning any awarded grants, must be current and accurate at the time of application.

If an application contains information that is false or misleading, it may be excluded from any further consideration for funding.

If the HRC believes that omission or inclusion of misleading information is intentional, it may refer to the host institution for the situation to be addressed under the provisions of the organisational code of conduct. The HRC also reserves the right to not accept future applications from the relevant investigators and/or to pursue legal action if appropriate. Examples of false or misleading information in an application include, but are not restricted to:

- violation of the standard codes of scholarly conduct and ethical behaviour
- providing fictitious CVs or biographical sketches, including roles in previous research
- omitting advice of publications which have been retracted or are to be considered for retraction
- falsifying claims in publications records (such as describing a paper as accepted for publication when it has only been submitted).

6.10 Complaints and appeals process

The HRC has a policy for considering and ruling on allegations of unfairness from an applicant for any HRC research funding. Complaints or requests for review of an application outcome must be

submitted in writing, through the research office of the application host organisation if one exists, or directly to the HRC in the absence of an organisational research office. An applicant may submit a complaint or request for review if they consider their application has been processed unfairly or differently from other like applications, setting out the way in which the applicant feels the application was processed differently, the alleged unfairness, and the remedy sought.

7. Assessing Committee (AC)

7.1 AC membership

There are a variety of needs that drive HRC AC member selection. While not limited to, these include expertise (relevant to the nature of applications received and assessment criteria to be applied) and diversity, with consideration of location, institutional spread, international balance, member turnover, gender balance, and other diversity considerations. An AC may consist of core members, who are experienced in HRC processes, and “expert” members, to provide expertise needed for a particular round. For those rounds with a two-stage process, members may be appointed to assess the Expressions of Interest and/or full applications. If possible, committee members should represent a wide range of departments or institutions in New Zealand, Australia and on occasion from other countries (as appropriate). Nomination and selection of AC members is undertaken by the HRC, AC committee chairs, with recommendations from research committees, and self-nomination by individuals via HRC Gateway, to achieve widespread representation. For example, more than two members from the same department would not be ideal. AC members, other than the chair(s), should not be involved in the process in other roles.

An AC generally consists of a chair or two co-chairs and 7-12 committee members, with the final membership dependent on the expertise requirements and the number of applications to be assessed. The chair(s) of each AC is a member (or designee) of one of the statutory research committees – the Public Health Research Committee (PHRC), the Biomedical Research Committee (BRC), and the Māori Health Committee (MHC). However, to avoid conflicts of interest, other members of the health research community from Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia (who are familiar with HRC processes) may chair AC meetings. AC members represent a mix of experts within their respective disciplines and are appointed based on their research expertise and ability to effectively assess the applications received in that funding round.

Proposals may be grouped so that all related proposals are reviewed by the same AC (e.g. all biomedical proposals within a sub-discipline), although the AC may have expertise in several sub-disciplines (e.g., cardiology and renal disease). Clinical trials and public health trials may be assessed by a separate AC(s) with appropriate expertise. The HRC will consult with the AC chairs to ensure there is appropriate expertise available on each AC to review the grouped proposals. If there are gaps in committee expertise for a particular application, then the HRC may seek expert comment to support assessment.

Māori health research proposals may be assessed by the Māori Health AC or by another appropriate assessing committee.

Pacific health research proposals may be assessed by the Pacific Health AC or by another appropriate assessing committee.

7.2 AC expertise

AC members are experienced researchers, who have the expertise relative to the breadth and scope of the research proposals and the assessment criteria assessed by the committee. Māori health and Pacific health experts are included as part of the review process.

AC members are expected to have:

- postgraduate qualifications in a discipline relevant to health research, and/or
- a track record as an active health researcher and may be a named investigator on a funded research proposal by a relevant funding agency (e.g. the HRC, Marsden Fund, Cancer Society) in the past three years, and/or
- a track record in policy analysis/advice in an agency/department relevant to health research (e.g. Ministry of Health), and/or
- a track record of community engagement or as a community or consumer advocate, and/or
- expertise in assessing the impact of health research.

In some circumstances, an AC could have some members whose expertise and experience differs from that described above, however, all members must be able to carry out the roles and responsibilities of a primary committee reviewer (CR1) and secondary committee reviewer (CR2) as required for the stage of assessment.

AC membership consists of experienced and inexperienced members, who are selected to provide the range of expertise needed for the applications to be assessed. In order to minimise scoring variation between committees, and from year to year, some of the members should have previous experience on a AC.

It is sometimes necessary to have specialised expertise on an AC to assess one aspect of applications that require their review, e.g., a biostatistician or a health economist.

For those rounds that utilise a two-stage process, the number of committees involved in assessing full applications may be less than for Expressions of Interest, and fewer committee members may be required to provide expertise on the mix of proposals. It is desirable to have some continuity of committee membership between the two stages.

7.3 Responsibilities of AC members

General

AC members are required to declare at the outset any potential conflicts of interest, specific to applications to be assessed by the committee, so that the impact of any such conflicts on the assessment process is managed appropriately.

To minimise potential conflicts of interest, the following is a key consideration for AC membership:

An AC member should not sit on a committee if they are a first named investigator or a named investigator on an application under consideration by that committee.

This means that anyone who is a **first named investigator** or a **named investigator** on an application under consideration in that round should not sit on the committee that is reviewing their application, but they may sit on or chair a different committee. However, a named investigator in a Programme application cannot be a CR1 or CR2 on a competing Programme.

AC members are required to keep all information about the assessment of research applications confidential, i.e. they may not discuss outside the AC meeting specific details about applicants, applications or outcomes. However, they are allowed to talk about their AC experience to colleagues in developing proposals.

Chair responsibilities

The HRC supports the appointment of co-chairs where there is appropriate expertise, as this helps to spread workload, achieve balance in chairing style and allow for succession planning. Consideration should also be given to limiting the term of an assessing committee chair, e.g. in line with their research committee term. The main responsibilities of the AC chair, with support from HRC staff, may include the following:

- approve (as required) the allocation of applications to be assessed by the AC
- approve and suggest potential committee members, taking into consideration: expertise, conflict of interest, location, gender balance, international balance, turnover of members, and Māori and/or Pacific expertise
- approve and suggest committee reviewer (CR) assignment of applications
- manage potential conflicts of interest
- attend the chairs' teleconference (where available)
- ensure that a fair, balanced and unbiased assessment is reached
- work with the HRC team to actively mitigate against and manage and respond to instances of bias in the meeting discussion
- ensure that all committee members contribute to the discussion
- ensure that committee discussion includes reference to all scoring criteria
- provide a chair feedback report on the process with a consensus view of the committee
- approve review summaries after the meeting
- help to respond to any complaints.

It is the responsibility of the chair and HRC staff to resolve any concerns regarding the integrity of the process.

Committee reviewer (CR) roles

Committee members may be assigned committee reviewer roles for specific applications to be assessed by the committee. As a committee reviewer, members will have additional responsibilities and may be required to introduce the application at the meeting. Assignment of CR roles is undertaken by the HRC in consultation with the AC chair(s). This is done taking into account potential conflicts of interest, expertise, experience, and workload.

Due to workload associated with the chair responsibilities and to ensure that AC processes are efficiently and consistently followed, the AC chair(s) will be assigned few or no CR roles, unless there are special circumstances, such as last-minute withdrawals from the AC or otherwise insufficient AC expertise.

Specialised experts (e.g. biostatistician, health economists) are generally not assigned committee reviewer roles for consistency of review of a technical nature across all applications assessed by that committee. A biostatistician can act as a CR1 or CR2 if a key aspect of an application includes novel methodology or statistical design, or a health economist can act as a CR1 or CR2 if the application has a strong health economics component. Alternatively, if the member has some subject expertise, they can act as a CR1 or CR2 (i.e. their review should not be focused on their area of technical expertise).

There are different types of committee reviewer roles depending on the grant type, stage of the process etc. For a number of the HRC assessing committees, there are two distinct committee reviewer roles:

Committee reviewer 1 (CR1)

- Provide a reviewer report prior to the assessing committee meeting.
- Provide a brief verbal summary of the application at the meeting, commenting on how the application addresses the score criteria. This is intended to be a brief recap to the committee of the application under consideration.
- Provide a review summary after the meeting. A review summary is a short summary of

the committee's feedback for an application (based on the committee's meeting discussion).

Committee reviewer 2 (CR2)

- Suggest and select potential external reviewers (with the HRC research investment manager) considering location and institutional spread, international balance, gender balance, and the relevant expertise needed.
- Summarise the findings and quality of the external reviewer reports and applicant responses at the meeting, particularly noting issues addressed well by the applicant, and those perhaps addressed less well or omitted.

The HRC generally aims to receive 3-4 reviewer reports for each proposal (depending on the grant type). If this number is exceeded, additional reports will be cancelled on the following basis: where it is clear that a major COI exists, the report is of exceptionally poor quality or the report was the last received by the HRC.

There may be scope for including an additional reviewer report for an application, if that reviewer's expertise was explicitly needed for a specific component of the research application (and a peer review report covering that component had yet to be secured). It is the role of the HRC to coordinate and oversee all communications with the reviewers. Committee members and applicants should **not** contact reviewers.

External reviewer reports are anonymised for the applicant response, but not for the AC.

The HRC may appoint an independent biostatistician to provide comment on this aspect of an application if deemed necessary.

Some committees may instead use a more generalised committee reviewer role, which may include some of the tasks specified under the two CR roles above. Other committees may also have other specific committee reviewer roles.

Preparing for meetings

Before the AC meeting, committee members will be given access to the applications to be assessed, along with additional details about the round or grant type, and any other relevant instructions or information.

Committee members will not have access to any applications for which a strong conflict of interest has been identified. Depending on the round or grant type, further documentation and information may be provided closer to the meeting date (for example, external peer reviewer reports and applicant responses).

Committee members are expected to read all the applications assigned to the committee, as well as all associated documentation. Committee members are expected to be familiar with all applications to be able to contribute to the discussion at the meeting.

For some meetings, members will be required to provide preliminary scores, which are used to rank the applications. Based on these preliminary scores, a proportion of the lowest-scoring applications may be triaged and not discussed at the meeting, and the committee members will be updated as required.

Assessing committee meeting

At the start of the meeting, the HRC provides a briefing that includes the procedure for identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest, maintaining confidentiality and managing bias, the meeting process, and the criteria on which the research applications are scored. This provides committee

members with the information and guidance they need to be consistent in their approach and to follow process.

The remainder of the meeting is allocated to the discussion and scoring of research applications. At the end, after all applications have been scored, the committee will produce a ranked list which will be used to make a funding recommendation to Council, or a recommendation of which applications should proceed to the next stage of assessment (e.g. at an EOI meeting).

7.4 AC administration

Detailed information is provided to members when they have been accepted into a committee. Assessment meetings are currently held virtually. The HRC is using virtual meetings as this format presents an opportunity to decrease the HRC's environmental footprint, potentially increase the diversity of committees, and reduce the risk of travel disruption due to COVID-19 or other events, impacting on the assessment process.

Time commitment

Committee members are assigned CR roles for a set of applications to be assessed by the committee. In addition, all members must be able to discuss all other applications at the committee meeting.

Pre-meeting preparation is an important part of the AC process and members must allow sufficient time to read all proposals. The time needed is dependent on the number of applications. At an EOI stage, approximately 20-40 applications could be assigned to the committee, and 2-5 proposals could be assigned to a CR. This may require several days to review and pre-score all applications using the HRC's online Gateway system. The bottom third (more or less) of applications may be triaged based on the average AC pre-scores, in consultation with the chair, and these will not be considered further. Following the triage process, some reallocation of CR roles may be required.

A full application AC meeting will follow the same format as the EOI AC meeting, except 10-30 applications may be assigned to a committee, with 2-4 assigned to individual CRs.

One to two days is generally required for an AC meeting. At present, assessing committee meetings are held via Zoom.

Meeting review

A review of the committee's effectiveness and functioning is a final responsibility at the end of any AC meeting. All members can provide comments and suggest areas of improvement. The AC chair(s) is asked to provide a short report noting issues that would be useful for future rounds. Feedback should be the consensus view of the committee or clearly identify where the view is that of an individual.

The feedback provided by committee members, either at the meeting or later, gives the HRC insight into any concerns or positive features that can be used to improve or maintain a high-quality peer review process.

8. Council funding decisions

The Council makes funding decisions for all applications for all grant types. Funding recommendations are prepared by HRC staff for Council consideration, following completion of the assessment process for all applications to that grant round. Information provided to Council includes scores and committee recommendations, assessment process, budget availability, and any other relevant information requested by Council.

Council member conflicts of interest in relation to applications or applicants is managed as described in this manual for those involved in the peer review process.

9. Contact details

Health Research Council of New Zealand
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Auckland 1142
Telephone: +64 9 303 5200

Email: info@hrc.govt.nz
Websites: www.hrc.govt.nz
<https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz>

Contact Us

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10. Version information

This section provides a document status only.

Title	2024 Peer Review Manual
Version/Issue Date/Status	June 2023
Supersedes Version/Issued on	2023 Peer Review Manual (October 2022)
Description of changes	The 2024 Peer Review Manual focuses on the overarching principles, roles, and considerations relating to the various stages of the HRC's peer review process. Grant specific information including assessment processes, eligibility criteria, and assessment criteria, will be available in the application guidelines for each grant type.
Approved by	Director, Investments
File name	2024 Peer Review Manual.doc; 2024 Peer Review Manual.pdf

Appendix 1. Abbreviations

AC	Assessing committee
BMAC	Biomedical/clinical Assessing Committee
BRC	Biomedical Research Committee
CDA	Career Development Awards
CDAC	Career Development Awards Assessing Committee
CR, CR1, CR2	Assessing committee reviewer, -1, -2
CV	Curriculum vitae
CTAC	Controlled Trials Assessing Committee
EOI	Expression of Interest
F/NF	Fundable/not fundable; or Full stage/not full stage for EOI
FA	Full application
HRC	Health Research Council of New Zealand
MHA	Māori health advancement
MHR	Māori health reviewer for Programme Assessing Committee
MHC	Māori Health Committee
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
NI	Named investigator
NSC	National Science Challenges
NZHD	New Zealand Health Delivery Research Investment Stream
PAC	Programme Assessing Committee
PHRC	Public Health Research Committee
PacificHRC	Pacific Health Research Committee
RHM	Rangahau Hauora Māori
RHAC	Rangahau Hauora Assessing Committee