



# Request for Proposals

May 2025

## 2025 NZ-China Biomedical Research Alliance RFP

This research initiative aims to support the development of research collaborations between New Zealand researchers and China-based 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 a portion of 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 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 China-based 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. Note that submission deadlines between these two agencies may differ; applicants are encouraged to consult with their collaborators when applications are due in their respective countries.

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 a maximum of two projects per year, subject to the highest scoring associated collaborator group also being shortlisted by MoST.

There is a limit of **one** application per 'first named investigator' or 'co-first named investigator'.

It is anticipated that funding for up to two projects will be available for an April 2026 start date. Due to the international nature of this initiative, there may be unavoidable delays to the funding announcement and the start date of the research project.

## 1. Background

This initiative is supported through the [Catalyst Fund](#) and is designed to support activities that initiate, develop and foster collaborations which take advantage of international science and innovation for New Zealand's benefit.

The Catalyst Fund objectives include:

- Targeted international partnerships maximise the impact and quality of New Zealand science and innovation.
- Emerging international science cooperation opportunities are pursued and advanced to deliver benefits to New Zealand.
- International science and innovation is leveraged in key areas, delivering benefit to New Zealand at a faster pace, of better quality, or of greater impact than can otherwise be achieved.

Under this overarching framework, the Catalyst Fund: Strategic specifically funds strategic research and large-scale pre-research collaborations with priority partners and in targeted areas. Its objectives are to:

- Demonstrate high-impact research in areas of relevance and importance to New Zealand's economic, societal, or environmental wellbeing.
- Advance New Zealand's global research connectivity, leveraging international expertise and increasing the integration of New Zealand research into global systems.
- Create opportunities for emerging researchers and leaders to build and benefit from global research and innovation industry connections.

Where applicable, proposals should consider the potential of Māori people, knowledge, and resources and reflect genuine, fit-for-purpose approaches for enabling that potential.

Proposals must also reflect Government policy, strategy, roadmaps, and international commitments where relevant.

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 March 2026 with funding available for an April 2026 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.

Funding for a maximum of 2 research projects is available each year.

## 3. Proposal requirements

### Research objectives

This grant will create opportunities for New Zealand scientists to identify and harness opportunities through collaborations with China-based 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.

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 for the 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 improving health outcomes for all New Zealanders, including those populations with the highest health needs.
- 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.

- Applicants must submit a registration.
- 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).
- There is a limit of one application per first named investigator. Failure to comply with this limit will result in the withdrawal of the application(s) (i.e. all applications submitted after the limit was reached).

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. Deliverables

**Regular progress reports** will be required for funded projects. These written reports detail the research progress and highlight any risks. Research providers will complete and submit progress reports via the HRC's online reporting system, HRC Gateway (<https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz>).

An **HRC end of contract report** is also required upon completing the research.

## 5. Application procedure

All application forms and guidelines are available via [HRC Gateway](#), the HRC's online application system. A summary of the application process is included below. For full details, refer to the 2025 NZ–China Biomedical Research Alliance Application Guidelines.

### Step 1: Registration

Applicants are required to submit a registration via [HRC Gateway](#) by **1pm, Thursday 29 May 2025**. 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 included in an application. To create an HRC Gateway account, click '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 2025 NZ–China Biomedical Research Alliance Full Application Form and submit via HRC Gateway by **1pm, Thursday 3 July 2025**.

Please refer to the 2025 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: Compliance check

The HRC will not process any application that does not comply with stated page limits, font sizes/styles or other requirements detailed in the 2025 NZ–China Biomedical Research Alliance Application Guidelines.

### Step 2: Assessing Committee independent scoring and triage

An Assessing Committee will be formed, and each member will be allocated a sub-set of applications to assess and score independently as per the HRC assessment criteria. Scores will be ranked and only the 10 highest-ranking applications will progress to the next step of the assessment process. Applications which do not progress at this stage will be triaged and will not continue to full assessment. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application when this step is complete. The 2025 NZ–China Biomedical Research Alliance RFP Application Guidelines outline the assessment criteria. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these criteria.

### Step 3: Peer review

The scientific integrity of the 10 highest-ranked 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 4: 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 5: Assessing Committee

The Assessing Committee will meet to discuss and assess the 10 highest-ranked applications, taking into consideration the peer-review reports and applicant rebuttal. The Assessing Committee will make recommendations for funding to be considered and approved by the HRC. This shortlist of fundable applications will then be compared with the shortlist of fundable applications provided by MoST. Up to a maximum of two proposals can be funded annually, both of which must appear in the shortlist for the HRC and for MoST, and then be confirmed for funding by the HRC, MBIE and MoST. The highest-quality and highest-ranked matches will be offered funding.

Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions in March 2026. 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:

Event	Description	Due date
Funding round opens	Applicants are invited to register	1pm, 1 May 2025
Registrations close	Registrations to be completed by this date	1pm, 29 May 2025
Full application due	Complete the full application via HRC Gateway	1pm, 3 July 2025
Pre-scoring	Applications pre-scored by assessing committee	Mid July – Mid August 2025
Applicants notified of application status	Applicants notified whether application will progress to full assessment	Late August 2025
Peer review period	Highest scoring applications proceed to external peer review	Late August – Mid October 2025
Applicant rebuttal opens	Applicants invited to provide a rebuttal to reviewers' comments	1pm, 22 October 2025
Applicant rebuttal closes	Rebuttal period closes	1pm, 5 Nov 2025
Committee assessment	Applications assessed by committee	Late November 2025
Results	Outcomes confirmed by HRC, MBIE and MoST	From March 2025

## 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.

### Intellectual Property Rights

It is expected that any research provider awarded a research contract under this RFP will agree to the Intellectual Property Rights as stated in the Fifth Schedule of the HRC Research Contract (refer Appendix 1 in the Fifth Schedule). Research providers should check the provisions of the Fifth Schedule and the research contract to understand their obligations and rights regarding intellectual property.

### Privacy provisions

The information you provide will be used to assess your application. In a non-identifiable form, some information will be used for HRC's statistical and reporting purposes. The HRC stores all applications in a secure place, which may include the New Zealand Research Information System (NZRIS) curated by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) with details provided by funders of the science sector. Personal information in your application will be available to members of the HRC assessing committees.

The HRC publishes details of research contracts including named investigators, the host organisation, research title, lay summaries and funding awarded for public interest purposes and to meet the statutory requirements of the Health Research Council Act 1990.

### Official Information Act

Official Information Act requests for information about an application or research contract, beyond information that has already been publicly disclosed, will be discussed with the host organisation and first named investigator before responding to the request. Where appropriate, the request may be transferred to the host organisation.

### Enquiries

All enquiries related to this RFP should be directed to your host organisation's Research Office.

Please contact the HRC at [info@hrc.govt.nz](mailto:info@hrc.govt.nz) if:

- your organisation does not have a Research Office
- your organisation's Research Office cannot assist you
- you have any technical difficulties (i.e. with HRC Gateway).