2025 PEER REVIEW MANUAL

for research applications to the Health Research Council of New Zealand

Table of Contents

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 Career Development Awards (CDA) Peer Review Manual for assessment processes for CDA.

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 Agent 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 applications 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 innovative, high-impact health research occurs primarily through annually run funding rounds designed to support excellent research ideas, develop excellent researchers, and to address research priorities. We have also long provided targeted funding for Māori and Pacific health research.

3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

As a Crown Agent, the HRC has a responsibility to ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi[1] is reflected in our investments. 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 processes to promote fairness and minimise bias.

4. The New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework

The New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework was launched in December 2019, setting out national priorities for health research. This is a high-level 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.

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[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.

The HRC is working to ensure that all our investment opportunities and processes are aligned with the actions outlined for research funders in the Prioritisation Framework.

What's changing and when?

We have introduced a number of changes in the HRC's funding opportunities to reflect the Prioritisation Framework. 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.

Any further changes to our funding opportunities or assessment processes will be clearly communicated in advance 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 Strategy and New Zealand Health Prioritisation Framework provide enduring strategic signals that guide the HRC's objectives and investment decisions. . We encourage researchers to consider both the strategy and the framework 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.

For more information, refer to the New Zealand Health Research Strategy and the New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework available here and 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   Disclosure and conflict of interest

The HRC aims to invest in research that meets New Zealanders' health needs and 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's interests conflict (or might be perceived to conflict) with the interests of the HRC as a Crown agency, such as situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, professional judgement in objectively assessing research applications. 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 conflict 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)."

To minimise potential conflict 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 application being discussed
- have collaborated, published or been a co-applicant with the applicant(s), within the last 5 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 when 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 conflict of interest for assessing committee members should be made as soon as possible to allow the conflict to be evaluated and an appropriate outcome or resolution to be achieved. The HRC and the AC Chairs 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. Then, 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 HRC staff and AC Chairs.
Level 3	The reviewer report must not be considered, or the AC member must not be present during discussion and scoring of the research application

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 an application, the HRC will consider the declaration in line with our conflicts of interest policy. 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 Chairs 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 application, 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 a 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.

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 any financial interests resulting from sponsorship when the research is funded by a non-governmental entity.

6.6   Confidentiality and retention of applications

In agreeing to take part, all reviewers must keep details of each application's assessment confidential.

This is because:

- Members do not sit on the peer review process in a representative capacity;
- Members must feel able to discuss applications freely; and
- Applicant's intellectual property needs to be protected, especially where applications have declared commercial interests.

The following guidance is for assessing committee members. These guidelines maintain confidentiality and protect the integrity of the peer review process:

- Applications and meeting documents are confidential and must not be shared with anyone. Should external advice from those outside the peer review process be necessary, members should discuss this with the HRC prior to engaging.
- Information in the application and/or directly related to the application must not be entered into Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) (see below for further information)
- Committee discussions and scoring for applications must remain confidential at all times. Any comments on applications are restricted to the committee discussion and cannot continue during breaks or outside of the meeting.
- Meeting 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's name. The HRC publishes a list of assessing committee 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 is for external reviewers. These guidelines 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 application that is most directly aligned with their expertise.
- Information in the application and/or directly related to the application must not be entered into Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- Applications and confidential meeting materials must not be shared with anyone. Should external advice from those outside the peer review process be necessary, member should discuss this with the HRC prior to engaging. External reviewer reports are anonymised for the applicant rebuttal but are identifiable to the assessing committee.
- Application and assessment 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.

Committee chairs may keep copies of research applications 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 until appropriate review summaries for applicant feedback is complete. Due to the risk of sensitive or confidential information being lost, applications and meeting materials should be stored as electronic files in a secure system instead of paper copies.

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 peer review would be in breach of the HRC's 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; members are asked to adhere to the code and keep it front of mind throughout the meeting

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[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/

process. The HRC has mechanisms in place to monitor for the expression of biases in 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, which helps ensure:
  - Conflicts of interests are managed appropriately, in line with best practice and HRC policy
  - Confidentiality is maintained
  - Discussion/scoring is fair and balanced
  - There is "round table" expertise and discussion
  - Decision-making is impartial and non-discriminatory.

All discriminatory and biased assessments are a detriment to the quality of our assessment process, and potentially impact 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 applicant's 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. 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 who provide expertise needed for a particular round. For 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.

Applications may be grouped so that all related applications are reviewed by the same AC (e.g. all biomedical applications 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 applications. If there are gaps in committee expertise for a particular application, then the HRC may seek expert comment to support assessment.

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

Pacific health research applications 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 expertise relative to the breadth and scope of the research applications 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 application 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. 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 an 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 applications. It is desirable to have some continuity of committee membership between the two stages.

7.3   Responsibilities of AC members

General

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

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

> an Assessing Committee 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 can talk about their AC experience to colleagues in developing applications.

Chairs' 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 Chairs, 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, institutional spread, 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' online pre-meeting (where available)
- ensure the assessments are fair and balanced
- 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 Chairs' report with committee's feedback on the process with a consensus view
- approve review summaries after the meeting
- help to respond to any complaints.

It is the responsibility of the Chairs 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 considering potential conflicts of interest, expertise, experience, and workload.

Due to workload associated with the Chairs' responsibilities and to ensure that AC processes are efficiently and consistently followed, the AC Chairs 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 most 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 verbal summary of the committee's main feedback after the application has been discussed. This summary highlights the application's key strengths and potential areas of improvement.
- Provide a review summary after the meeting. A review summary is a short, written 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 staff) considering location and institutional spread, international balance, gender balance, and the relevant expertise needed.
- Summarise the findings and quality of the reviewer reports and applicant rebuttals 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 application (depending on the grant type). If this number is exceeded, additional reports will be cancelled on the following basis: where 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 rebuttal, but identifiable to 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, peer reviewer reports and applicant rebuttals).

Committee members are expected to read all the applications assigned to the committee and 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 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 the process.

The remainder of the meeting is allocated to discussing and scoring 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 their committee membership is confirmed. 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 disruptions 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 applications. 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 applications could be assigned to a CR. This may require several days to review and pre-score applications (for some grant types) 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 Chairs, 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.

Expenses

AC fees payable to committee members are listed here. Fees are calculated on a pro-rata basis for shorter meetings. Claimable expenses are explained in Appendix 1: Assessing Committee fees and expenses.

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 Chairs are 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. A Chairs' report template is in the Appendix 2. Assessing Committee Chairs' Report

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.

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.

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 funding round. Information provided to Council includes scores and committee recommendations, assessment process, budget availability, and any other relevant information requested by Council.

Council manages any members' conflicts of interest (in relation to applications or applicants) in the same way as described in this manual for those involved in the peer review process.

9. Contact details

Health Research Council of New Zealand
PO Box 5541, Victoria Street West
Auckland 1142
Telephone: +64 9 303 5200

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

Contact Us

If you have any questions about the HRC or would like to know more about our funding processes, please contact us: info@hrc.govt.nz

10.   Version information

This section provides a document status only.

Title	**2025 Peer Review Manual**
Version/Issue Date/Status	**June 2024**
Supersedes Version/Issued on	**2024 Peer Review Manual (June 2023)**
Description of changes	The 2025 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	**2025 Peer Review Manual.doc; 2025 Peer Review Manual.pdf**

Appendix 1. Assessing committee fees and expenses

Expression of Interest AC (for a 2-day meeting)

	Committee chair	Committee member	Ad hoc member*
Meeting fee (*per diem* x 2 days)	$600.00	$450.00	$450.00
Meeting preparation fee	$900.00	$675.00	$675.00
Review summary preparation	$225.00**	$225.00**	
Review of review summaries	$112.50		
Chair's report to the HRC	$225.00		
TOTAL	$2,062.50	$1,350.00	$1,125.00

Full Application AC / Ngā Kanohi Kitea Full Stage (for a 2-day meeting)

	Committee chair	Committee member	Ad hoc member*	Technical reviewer
Meeting fee (*per diem* x 2 days)	$600.00	$450.00	$450.00	
Meeting preparation fee	$300.00	$225.00	$225.00	
CR1 reviewer report preparation	$337.50**	$337.50**		
Review summary preparation	$225.00**	$225.00**		
Presentation report preparation			$112.50	
Review of review summaries	$112.50			
Chair's report to the HRC	$225.00			
Technical report preparation				$56.25 per application
TOTAL	$1,800	$1,237.50	$787.50	

Programme Assessing Committee (PAC) Member (for a 3-day meeting)

	Committee Chair	Committee Member	MHR Member	Technical Reviewer
Meeting fee (*per diem* x 3 days)	$900.00	$675.00	$675.00	
Meeting preparation fee	$300.00	$225.00	$225.00	
CR/MHR preparation	$675.00**	$450.00**	$675.00	
Review summary preparation		$225.00**	$225.00**	
Review of review summaries	$112.50			
Chair's report to the HRC	$225.00			
Technical report preparation				$112.50 per application
TOTAL	$2,212.50	$1,575.00	$1,800	

Emerging Researcher First Grant AC (for a 2-day meeting)

	Committee Chair	Committee Member	Ad hoc Member*
Meeting fee (*per diem* x 2 days)	$600.00	$450.00	$450.00
Meeting preparation fee	$225.00	$225.00	
Review summary preparation	$225.00**	$225.00**	
Presentation report preparation			$112.50
Review of review summaries	$112.50		
Chair's report to the HRC	$225.00		
TOTAL	$1,387.50	$900.00	$562.50

Explorer Grant AC		
	Committee Chair	Committee Member
Meeting fee	$300.00***	$112.50****
Meeting preparation fee	$300.00	$225.00
Chair's report to the HRC	$225.00	
TOTAL	$825.00	$337.50

*Can include biostatisticians or other members providing input related only to their area of expertise. These members do not have CR roles as above and can act in an advisory capacity.
** Only paid if assigned these roles.
***Chair paid a one-day meeting fee.
****Members are paid half meeting fee.

Expenses

Please note that fees will be paid upon receipt of review summary commitments.

An expense claim form is provided. Members should keep an accurate account of expenses and submit receipts with the claim.

Printing costs

Printed copies of applications will not be distributed to all committees. However, some committee members may wish to have hard copies to work with. In that case, printing costs may be claimed as an expense.

Appendix 2. Assessing Committee Chairs' Report

Committee name	
Chair(s)	
Date(s)	
Research Investment Manager	
BM/Clin/PH/MH/PacH	

Please provide brief comments or bullet points in the following sections, which represent the consensus views from the committee. This confidential information will be forwarded to the HRC statutory committees and used for the continuous improvement of HRC processes. Committee members can also send any comments or feedback confidentially directly to the Chairs and/or the HRC.

1. **Administration and communications**

2. **Committee membership, expertise and working relationship**

3. **Integrity of the process**

   - **Management of COIs**

   - **Maintaining confidentiality**

   - **Mitigating against bias including code of conduct**

4. **Assessment of applications**

   - **Assessment of Māori Health Advancement**

   - **Virtual meeting environment**

   - **Key recommendations**

5. **Comments about HRC Gateway**

6. **Other comments**

Appendix 3. 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
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