



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

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

June 2024

2025 PROJECT EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) APPLICATION GUIDELINES

To use with form:

2025 Project Expression of Interest (EOI) Form



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Part A: What is a Project?

1. Project introduction

HRC Projects should address well-defined research questions with the aim of significantly improving or developing knowledge that contributes to health outcomes. The HRC will offer contracts worth \$400,000 per year to a maximum value of \$1,200,000 for a three to five-year term, or pro rata for a shorter contract. For example, a two-year project may have a budget of up to \$800,000 or a five-year project may have a budget of up to \$1,200,000. Most projects have a term of three years with a budget of \$1,200,000.

Applicants who submit randomised controlled trial project applications can request an increase in budget cap to a maximum of no more than 20% (\$1,440,000), if required. At the Expression of Interest (EOI) stage, applicants are advised to include a comment in their application that they anticipate seeking an increase in budget cap (should the EOI be successful) but no specific budget details are required at this stage.

The HRC expects to fund a range of grant values and durations.

2. Project categories

Applicants **must** select one of the following project categories:

- **General Project:** Supporting excellent ideas and innovations proposed by researchers, designed to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, equitably, for New Zealanders.
- **Rangahau Hauora Māori Project:** Supporting Māori health research that upholds rangatiratanga and utilises and advances Māori knowledge, resources, and people.
- **Pacific Project:** Making significant improvements in, or developing knowledge contributing to, Pacific health outcomes.

Note: The Health Delivery Research Project Grant round is run out of cycle via the Health Delivery Research Investment Round. This round includes a range of different grant types, in addition to project grants.

The same application cannot be submitted to different categories, i.e. General Project, Rangahau Hauora Māori Project, or Pacific Project, as this creates avoidable duplication of both application and assessment effort.

The HRC does not provide advice on choice of project category, as that decision is best made by the investigator. Applicants may change their final choice of project category by creating duplicate applications and deciding on the most appropriate project category before the closing date for registration. The project category cannot be changed between the EOI and Full stages.

3. Rules regarding named investigators on Project contracts

A 'first named investigator' (i.e. lead researcher) on a project application must be employed by a New Zealand host organisation, have New Zealand citizenship or permanent residency status and be domiciled in New Zealand.

The HRC welcomes applications from 'co-first named investigators' under circumstances that would result in a research team of exceptional strength, such as interdisciplinary work. In addition, early and mid-career researchers who have not previously held a project contract are encouraged to apply as co-first named investigator in combination with a mentor/experienced researcher. Residency conditions apply to both co-first named investigators.

There is a limit of **two** project applications per first named investigator/co-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).

4. Important note – use of forms

Use these guidelines and the 2025 Project EOI Form when submitting a General Project EOI application.

Use the separate guidelines and the 2025 Rangahau Hauora Māori Project EOI Form when submitting a Rangahau Hauora Māori Project EOI application.

Use the separate guidelines and the 2025 Pacific Project EOI Form when submitting a Pacific Project EOI application.

5. Project assessment process

Project applications are assessed through several steps, via a two-stage process:

Stage 1

- An Assessing Committee assesses EOI applications and recommend applications to invite for full application.

Stage 2

- External review of the full applications and applicant rebuttal.
- An Assessing Committee assesses full applications.
- Funding decisions by HRC Council.

For more details, please refer to the HRC Peer Review Manual which can be found on HRC Gateway.

Part B: What is an Expression of Interest (EOI)?

The EOI provides an overview of the proposed research and is the first stage of a two-stage application process for HRC Projects. The second stage is Full Application. The EOI should provide sufficient information for assessing committees to review based on established scoring criteria, and to recommend who should proceed with a full application submission.

Although short in length, applicants must demonstrate a credible level of critical thinking and research planning across all the score domains. Host organisations have an important role in supporting applicants to present their EOI in a clear and compelling manner. It is recognised that the level of detail able to be provided is restricted by the page limit, and Assessing Committee members are encouraged to consider this.

Full applications **must not** be substantially different from the initial EOI in either research team or research plans/objectives, since these are the criteria that were scored and qualified the application for this stage. Concerns about this will be discussed with the EOI Assessing Committee Chairs and a decision made whether to accept the application for further assessment.

There are 3 modules in an EOI application form:

Module 1 is completed on HRC Gateway. All investigators must have an HRC Gateway account and current profile so that they can be included on an application.

Module 2 is on a separate document (2025 Project EOI Form) that is completed offline and then uploaded using HRC Gateway.

Module 3 is completed on the NZ Standard CV template and uploaded to HRC Gateway.

The table below outlines the process and timeframes for submitting an EOI application.

Applicants must allow time for the host organisation Research Office to approve and process applications prior to final submission to the HRC.

Event	Description	Date
EOI opens	EOI round opens in Gateway	Opens 6 June 2024 (1pm)
Registration closes	Registration deadline in Gateway	Closes 4 July 2024 (1pm)
EOI closes	Complete online sections & upload 2025 Project EOI Form	Closes 11 July 2024 (1pm)
EOI assessment	Review by HRC Assessing Committee	During September 2024
EOI results	EOI results	1 October 2024 (1pm)

Part C: General rules for submitting a Project EOI application

1. Use of 2025 Project EOI Forms

When to use the 2025 Project EOI Form

The 2025 Project EOI Form must be used when submitting a General Project EOI application. For Rangahau Hauora Māori Project EOI applications, use the 2025 Rangahau Hauora Māori Project EOI Form. For Pacific Project EOI applications, use the 2025 Pacific Project EOI Form.

Prior to submission

The HRC only accepts applications via HRC Gateway. Prior to any submission, named investigators must have a current Gateway account, that must be updated annually. Key opening and due dates are in the section above.

Before submitting this application form, applicants should read:

- This document for eligibility and specific instructions
- Guidelines on Health Research involving Māori
- Māori Health Advancement Guidelines
- Guidelines for Pacific Health Research
- Guidelines on Ethics in Health Research
- HRC Research Impact Slideshow
- The appropriate Peer Review Manual to understand application assessment.

The regularly updated reference documents and forms are on HRC Gateway.

New host organisation

New host organisations that have not previously been funded by the HRC will be required to provide due diligence information before a contract can be offered. Please contact the HRC for further information. The host organisation is the institution or organisation that will be responsible for ensuring an awarded grant is completed according to the requirements of this grant type.

2. Format

General formatting

Applications must be written in a clear, concise manner with sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to understand the scope and implications of the application. Please note Assessing Committee membership is composed of a broad range of expertise.

Applications must be in English or te reo Māori; if in te reo Māori, a translation in English must also be provided (any translation will not be included in the page limit).

Use the correct HRC form as it contains special features.

Applicants must:

- Use Arial 10-point type font or larger
- Use default margins
- Use single line spacing
- Not exceed any page limits.

Compliance

The HRC will not process any application that does not comply with stated page limits and font sizes/styles.

Additional documents

No other documents are to be included.

3. Copies of applications required

Electronic copy

Submit the 2025 Project EOI form as a PDF file using HRC Gateway. Ensure that the PDF version meets page limits, and that graphics and tables are converted correctly from the Word version.

The HRC Gateway will allocate file names.

Important

The application is submitted to the host organisation's Research Office when the applicant uploads the files through HRC Gateway. The application will be forwarded to the HRC after their approval. Always allow sufficient time before the HRC closing date for this approval step. For organisations without a Research Office, the application will be forwarded directly to the HRC.

Do not send files

Do not send digital files directly to the HRC. Independent researchers and research providers requiring assistance with using HRC Gateway should contact the HRC in the first instance.

4. Closing dates for EOI

Submission of an EOI application online

The EOI application is submitted in two parts:

The first part involves submitting a registration via HRC Gateway by **1pm, 4 July 2024**.

The closing date for online submission of the EOI to the HRC is **1pm, 11 July 2024**.

The EOI is released to the HRC only after approval by the Research Office (for organisations with Research Offices). It must be submitted to the **HRC Gateway** online by closing date and time.

Incomplete applications

Incomplete applications will be regarded as withdrawn.

5. Privacy provisions

Statistical and reporting purposes

The information provided in an application will be used for assessing that application and, in a non-identifiable form, some information will be used for HRC statistical and reporting purposes. The HRC undertakes to store all applications securely, which may include the New Zealand Research Information System (NZRIS) curated by MBIE with details provided by funders of the science sector.

Personal information

Personal information contained in the application will be available to members of the HRC Committees and to external reviewers relevant to the review of the application.

Media release

The HRC publishes details of research contracts including named investigators, host institution, research title, lay summaries and the amount of 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 will be discussed with the host institution and investigator before responding to the request. Where appropriate, the request may be transferred to the host institution.

6. Enquiries

All enquiries related to HRC applications should be directed in the first instance to the host organisation's Research Office.

For organisations without a Research Office or if the Research Office cannot assist, or for technical enquiries relating to applications, contact the HRC: info@hrc.govt.nz

Part D: Submitting an EOI – completion of the 2025 Project EOI Form

Module 1 of the EOI application must be completed on HRC Gateway. The 2025 Project EOI Form contains a coversheet and Module 2 of the EOI application. The form can be downloaded and completed before being uploaded to HRC Gateway as a PDF file. Module 3 is completed on the NZ Standard CV template and uploaded to HRC Gateway. The completed application (Modules 1-3) will be compiled by HRC Gateway; it can then be accessed for downloading and printing.

Note: By submitting an application to the HRC on Gateway the applicant is confirming that the submitted application complies with all requirements including formatting and page limits. The HRC will not accept changes after the closing date.

1. Use of the 2025 Project EOI Form

Please use the original 2025 Project EOI Form as it contains special features:

- Complete all sections following the instructions on the form and described in the guidelines.
- Enter the HRC Ref ID and first named investigator surname on coversheet.
- **HRC Gateway will remove the coversheet from the final system-generated PDF.**

2. Module 1: General information

This Module must be completed in HRC Gateway. Start the application process by clicking on the 'Apply now' button on the 2025 Projects information page. The 'Apply now' button will only appear when the application submission period is open. Clicking on the 'Apply now' button will open a dialog form where the following information will be required.

1st Step

The applicant will first be required to select a project category, enter a research title, and select a host organisation (there will also be options to select a specific Research Office and Research Office contact if applicable).

Project category

Select the project category for the application.

The HRC cannot re-assign applications that are entered into the wrong category. If you wish to change categories while applying, you need to create a new registration on Gateway.

Research title

The research title should be succinct and clearly describe the proposed project. The title must not exceed 80 characters, including spaces and punctuation (e.g. 'growth factors' contains 14 characters). Do not use all uppercase type.

Host organisation

The host organisation is the organisation that will be responsible for administering any contract awarded. For example, for those applicants at University of Otago's Wellington campus, the host institution is the University of Otago.

Select the relevant 'host organisation' from the drop-down list (this shows host organisations currently recognised by the HRC). If applicable, a specific Research Office and Research Office contact will be able to be selected.

Please note: If your host organisation does not appear in the drop-down list, please tick the check box 'My host organisation is not in the list'. A field 'Host organisation details' will appear in the next section and the name of the host organisation should be entered here.

If the host organisation has a Research Office with more than one staff member, please select the contact in the office who will most likely be handling the application, or who will be the principal contact.

If the host organisation has more than one Research Office, please select which office will be handling the application.

2nd Step

First named investigator

Some of this information will be automatically populated from the first named investigator's profile in Gateway (e.g. organisation and department). If the profile is not current, details must be updated. The details listed on the application will be automatically refreshed after the profile is updated. Click on the 'Update' button to enter and update the information requested.

The first named investigator will be considered the first point of contact during the application and assessment process, and will be understood to be acting for, and in concurrence with, the other named investigators. All correspondence for the application will be addressed to this person and the host. Once an application is created, the first named investigator cannot be changed.

In the case of co-first named investigators, applicants need to add 'Named Investigators' and choose the role of "co-first named Investigators" in the dropdown list. The role of co-first named investigator should be described in the appropriate section of the form.

3rd Step

Click on the 'Update' button to enter details for the following fields.

Note: if a field does not need to be completed until the full application stage, there will be a blank space next to that field. Information will only be able to be entered at the full application stage.

Named investigators

All named investigators must be registered users of HRC Gateway before they can be added to the application. User profiles must be updated by each named investigator before submitting an application so that the current details are in the application. Click on the "Update" button to enter additional information as requested. All named investigators on successful applications may be cited by the HRC in its various communication channels.

Role in project should include brief information on what the investigator will undertake in the project (1-2 sentences max).

Information on ethnicity, gender and whether the researcher is a clinician (and is practicing) is used for HRC information purposes only. Please note ethnicity, iwi, clinician, or practising clinician are not required to be entered as these details will automatically populate from the individual person profiles. Each named investigator will need to sign-in to HRC Gateway and check and update their details before EOI applications are submitted.

You may wish to designate a hapū, iwi or Māori organisation conducting the research that needs to be acknowledged, in their own right, as investigators on the application. It is still essential to list supporting named investigators.

The HRC has updated how it captures Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) in the EOI application using the following FTE 'bands':

- 3% - 10% (Low FTE)
- 11% - 40% (Medium FTE)
- 41% - 100% (High FTE)

Selecting an FTE band for each named investigator is required at EOI stage, as the Assessing Committee needs to know the level of commitment or responsibility of each team member. It is particularly important to identify more junior investigators who may undertake key components of the proposed research.

Research location(s)

This is the specific department(s) and organisation where the majority of research or data analysis will be undertaken.

Discipline

Select from the drop-down box.

Duration

Enter the proposed term of the research (months).

Type of research

Choose from the dropdown list what you consider the most appropriate term for broadly describing the research application for assessment purposes. The HRC reserves the right to reassign applications to the most appropriate Assessing Committee.

Commencement date

Enter the proposed commencement date. Please note that contracts cannot be activated until 1 July 2025 at the earliest. Recipients are required to begin within three months of contract offer.

Lay summary

The lay summary should summarise the intent of the research, planned methods, as well as the potential health benefits or outcomes that could arise as a result of the HRC supporting this application. This information will be used to inform the Council in the final approval process, if the application is recommended for funding. The lay summary will also be publicised through the HRC's communication channels (e.g. website) and should be written to be readily understood by the general public (150-word limit). This may be modified slightly for the full stage application.

ANZSRC and keywords

This information is for HRC data collection purposes only.

Categorise the proposed research using the ANZSRC codes for the Fields of Research (FOR) and Socioeconomic Objective (SEO). Enter the percentage to the nearest 10% for each category to a total of 100%.

Enter keywords that categorise the research.

3. Module 2: Proposed research

The page limit for this Section is **3 pages (not including references)**

The section headings provided must be used. The Assessing Committee membership is broadly discipline-based, matched to the range of applications assigned to that committee. Therefore, not all members will have specialist knowledge of every research topic. It is advised to write the application for members with a general understanding of the research area/field.

The use of graphics and tables is an efficient use of space. Ensure that the format of non-text content is compatible with PDF conversion software.

The section headings correspond to the five equally weighted score criteria which form the basis of assessment (Rationale for research, Research design and methods, Research impact, Māori Health Advancement, Expertise and track record of the team).

Rationale for research

Provide the research rationale with a robust demonstration of the research gap and a statement of purpose or research aims for scientific enquiry, hypothesis, new knowledge, technical advance and innovation.

Demonstrate that you have adequately reviewed what is already known in the area and that there is a clear case for further research. For example, refer to systematic reviews or an otherwise robust demonstration of a research gap. Include information that is essential for the reader to better appreciate or understand why your proposed research should be undertaken. What is the

significant/important gap in knowledge, policy, practice, or service delivery that your research will address? How does your proposed research build on existing knowledge and evidence, and how will it contribute to, or align with, research currently being undertaken either nationally or internationally? For example, is it unique to New Zealand? What is the significance of the health issue for New Zealand health and society? What is the significance for Māori health advancement? Is this an extension of current ongoing research, e.g. additional tests or sampling? Preliminary or published data?

Research design and methods

Provide sufficient details for technical assessment of scientific protocol, feasibility and validity of data.

Include sufficient detail of study design and methods so that an assessment can be made of its appropriateness, robustness and/or innovativeness. This might include a description of participant recruitment and characteristics (including number, gender, and ethnicity where relevant), study methods, and proposed methods of data collection and analysis.

Clinical trial applications are to include a description of data and safety monitoring arrangements. Where appropriate, provide an estimate of the likely effect size and the sample size required to detect this (power analysis). It is also advisable for randomised controlled trials to refer to the CONSORT Statement and checklist. For observational studies, it is advised to refer to the STROBE guidelines. For animal studies, referring to the ARRIVE guidelines is advised.

Indication of timelines for the research should be included. Consultation with specialists such as methodologists, statisticians, data scientists, and health economists before finalising your research design is recommended.

The Assessing Committees need this information to judge and appropriately score this criterion. Therefore, ensure that the practicalities are clearly stated, i.e. what will be done, how, by whom, where and when; preliminary data can be included.

Research impact

Note: applicants for all project categories are not required to link their impact section to the Goals of the investment signal for the previous research investment streams. This is to encourage applicants to consider all potential ways in which their application can add value for New Zealand, and what actions within their influence can help achieve this potential. Assessment of Impact now includes two components: 1) a **description** of how your research might be used and the anticipated benefits for NZ, and 2) the **action plan** to maximise the use and benefits of the research. See the HRC's Research Impact Slideshow for additional guidance on completing this section. ¹

What types of benefits are expected to arise from your research, and **who will benefit?**

This section should provide a realistic description of how research findings could contribute to improved health or other societal benefits over time (a 'line of sight' or 'pathway' to impact). Importantly, it should also identify the more immediate benefits, and users of the research who will form a focal point for your Action Plan (below). The balance between describing short-term benefits and potential longer-term impact will be dependent on the specific research context, with emphasis on considerations within your sphere of influence throughout the life of the research project.

The HRC's Research Impact Slideshow includes discussion of elements that should be covered in this section, including the **types of benefits and research users**, and the **geographical distribution of benefits** (such as how contribution to international research effort will benefit NZ). Research-related benefits, such as capacity and capability gains for NZ, and influence on future research agenda-setting, may be included where relevant.

What specific activities will you undertake, throughout the life of the research project, to maximise the use and benefits of your research?

¹Consult the HRC's Research Impact Slideshow on the HRC website for further discussion on the types of benefits that can arise from health research, and where these benefits might be expected to occur along a pathway to impact.

Describe what targeted actions have been, or will be, taken² to improve the likelihood of research uptake and impact, and to ensure that the next users or end users (identified in the previous section) can meaningfully contribute to, and/or benefit from, the research. Describe other planned dissemination activities that are designed to reach broader audiences. Who can enable the uptake of your research, and how have they been involved in your research? Identify uncertainties to uptake, or systematic/institutional barriers, and your mitigation strategies (where relevant).

What elements of the **team's track record of knowledge transfer** provide confidence in the likelihood of research uptake? For example: existing links, relationships, or networks with relevant research next-users or end-users; demonstrable examples of knowledge mobilisation, or changes in health outcomes or societal impact generated from similar research. This component is considered relative to opportunity.

Māori health advancement (MHA)

The HRC expects applicants for HRC research funding to consider all potential ways in which their application will advance Māori health, and to outline what actions they will undertake to help achieve this potential. Assessment of Māori health advancement (MHA) will explicitly consider two components:

- An outline of contributions the research may make to advancing Māori health.
- Specific actions that have been, and will be, undertaken to realise the contribution to advancing Māori health through the life of the project and also beyond it.

All applicants for HRC funding are required to address these two questions in their applications. In responding to these questions, applicants should consider how their research is informed by the four domains of Māori health advancement (see the Māori Health Advancement Guidelines for more details). Researchers are encouraged to consider the domains during development of their research, as this may identify aspects of the research not previously considered. It is not a requirement that all four domains are specifically addressed in the application, but researchers are advised to consider each in formulating the strongest rationale for the application.

Alignment of the response to the 'Māori health advancement' criterion and other assessment criteria will strengthen an application.

1. How will the outcomes of your research contribute to Māori health advancement?

Provide a realistic description of how this research could contribute to improved Māori health outcomes or reductions in inequity over time. Consideration should be given to potential short-term and/or longer-term Māori health gains, within the specific context of the research and where it is positioned along the research pathway (cf. potential 'line of sight' or 'pathway' to impact). In addition, more immediate users and beneficiaries of the research who can utilise the research findings for Māori health gain should be identified.

2. What activities have you already undertaken (that are relevant to this project), and what will you undertake during this project, that will realise your research contribution to Māori health advancement?

Describe specific actions that have been, and will be, undertaken (from the development of the research idea through to the completion of the project) to maximise the likelihood that this research will contribute to Māori health advancement. Outline actions taken to ensure that the next users or beneficiaries of the research can utilise the findings for Māori health gain.

If the research is not expected to make direct contributions to Māori health outcomes, identify actions that will be undertaken throughout the life of the project to contribute to other facets of Māori health advancement. Identify barriers to actioning your aspirations for advancing Māori health, and your mitigation strategies (where relevant). Identify elements of the team's track record that provide confidence that this research will optimally contribute to Māori health advancement. For example: existing links, relationships, or networks with relevant Māori communities and next-users or end-users

² Consult HRC Guidelines and funding rules for information on support of knowledge transfer activities and include these activities in objectives/milestones where appropriate. Progress against implementing the action plan will form part of the milestones HRC monitors with respect to contractual compliance and delivery.

of research; demonstrable examples of knowledge translation and uptake; or changes to practice or policy that have enhanced equity and advanced Māori health.

Expertise and track record of the research team

Evidence that the team has the experience, qualifications, and infrastructure to deliver the research. The role of each team member is required.

Include a brief description of the team's track record, related to the application area, to demonstrate the ability to deliver proposed study outcomes. Highlight important skills and/or expertise in the team that would support delivery of the proposed research. Give consideration to capacity building.

Describe any career disruptions, and their impact, that may be relevant to your career history. A career disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant's capacity to work due to pregnancy, major illness/injury, parental leave, and/or carer responsibilities.

Clearly define the role, expertise, and track record of each member of the team giving particular weight to those with high FTE commitments to the project. Team members' unique identifiers on publication databases such as Scopus or Google Scholar may be provided in relation to their FTE. Justification for staff roles should be provided. The role and FTE band of each team member is required in Module 1. Please state if you have previously collaborated with the team assembled for this application. Note that changes in the research team between the EOI and the Full application require HRC's prior approval. In addition, state how you have utilised previous funding resources and your productivity.

The HRC recognises that applicants with experience in sectors other than public sector research may have gained valuable expertise or produced outputs (e.g. patents) relevant to research translation, and this may have limited the applicant's opportunity to produce more traditional research outputs.

References (one page)

Put references in this part of the form after the 3 pages describing the proposed research. Do not extend the research description onto the references page.

Details must include a **full list of all author(s)**, title of article, journal, year, volume and page numbers. Asterisks are to be placed beside applicants' publications. If references are multi-authored, there is discretion to limit the author list to a more convenient number to fit any space limitations.

A reference to Māori terms in the application with a brief translation could be included in this section but is not included in the page limit.

New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework Domains

This information is for HRC data collection purposes only and will not be used in the assessment of 2025 Project applications.

There are four domains in the New Zealand Health Research Prioritisation Framework (NZHRPF). Please read the [NZHRPF](#) for more details and identify the primary Domain that your proposed research is most aligned with, and up to one additional secondary Domain.

Domain 1: Healthy people, whānau and communities

Domain 2: People-centred healthcare

Domain 3: Meeting our needs in a changing world

Domain 4: Connected government and systems.

The HRC does not provide advice on choice of Domains, as that decision is best made by the investigator.

The selection of Domains can be changed for the full application.

4. Module 3: NZ standard CV

Note: Two CVs can be provided at this stage.

Upload the CV of the 'first named investigator' who has overall responsibility for the Project, and another named investigator who may be most involved in the day-to-day research activity of the Project, on HRC Gateway. The NZ Standard CV template is downloadable from the HRC website.

Applications must use the original CV formatting including the default font and page limits. The HRC will not accept any other form of CV.

Appendix 1: General Project application assessment process

1. Overview

1.1 Two-stage process

Project applications are processed through a two-stage process. Stage One is an Expression of Interest (EOI), which identifies the area of research and gives an overview of the proposed study, methodology, potential research impact, potential Māori health advancement and a description of the research team. EOI applications are assessed and ranked with the intention that those invited to Stage Two full applications will have an overall success rate of approximately forty per cent.

1.2 Stage One: EOI application

Assessing Committee (AC) members score the EOI prior to the Assessing Committee meeting to yield a ranked list. Lowest scoring applications are usually triaged, i.e. not discussed at the meeting. At the Assessing Committee meeting, the applications are discussed and scored using the criteria described below and ranked by total score.

Only highly ranked applicants will be invited to submit full applications.

1.3 Stage Two: Full application

Full applications are reviewed initially by external reviewers and the Committee Reviewer 1 (CR1). Applicants can comment on the reviewer reports through the applicant rebuttal. At the Assessing Committee meeting, each application, along with its reviewer reports and applicant rebuttal, is considered. Assessing Committee members discuss and score the applications using the criteria described below.

Ranked applications from the Assessing Committee are collated and may be considered by the Grant Approval Committee (GAC), a sub-committee of the HRC Council, before being presented to Council to make funding decisions.

2. Assessment of EOI

Assessing Committee members have two opportunities to score EOI. Prior to the EOI Assessing Committee meeting, committee members individually score all applications assigned to the committee using the HRC online submission system; the details for this are provided to the members by the HRC staff. At the EOI Assessing Committee meeting, committee members confidentially score the applications.

2.1 Scoring criteria: General category

Applications are scored on a 7-point word ladder using the following equally weighted criteria for the General category. These are listed below with full description in [Appendix 2: Scoring criteria and anchor point descriptors](#).

- Rationale for research
- Research design and methods
- Research impact
- Māori health advancement
- Expertise and track record of the research team

The 7-point word ladder assists Assessing Committee scoring according to the descriptors rather than other considerations such as success rates of applications. Reviewers may only allocate whole scores.

Score	Criteria descriptor
7	Exceptional
6	Excellent
5	Very good
4	Good
3	Adequate
2	Unsatisfactory
1	Poor

The criteria are scored using a 7-point scale of equal weighting, as listed in the table, so that the total maximum score is 35.

Criteria	Points	% score
Rationale for research	7	20
Research design and methods	7	20
Research impact	7	20
Māori health advancement	7	20
Expertise and track record of the research team	7	20
Total	35	100

2.2 EOI Assessing Committee pre-meeting procedure

Prior to the meeting, Assessing Committee members will be required to provide preliminary scores (submitted via HRC Gateway), which are used to rank the applications. Based on these preliminary scores, up to 40% of applications in each Assessing Committee will be triaged and not discussed at the meeting. Assessing Committee members are assigned to applications to act as the committee reviewer (CR), based on their expertise and to avoid conflicts of interests. Assessing Committee members are then provided with the list of applications for discussion in a randomised order.

2.3 EOI Assessing Committee meeting procedure and scoring

The Chairs are responsible for ensuring assessments are fair and balanced. General discussion by all committee members is essential for a balanced committee opinion, not unduly influenced by one committee member and should not be cut short nor unduly extended.

The discussion time allocated to each EOI is up to 20 minutes, for example:

- declaration of conflicts of interest - 2 minutes
- CR comments - 2 minutes
- general discussion of the application - 12 minutes
- scoring - 2 minutes
- CR notes Review Summary points – 2 minutes.

The scores are submitted via HRC Gateway and collated confidentially by the HRC staff.

The scoring criteria and descriptors used at the EOI Assessing Committee meeting are the same as those used for the preliminary scoring prior to the meeting.

2.4 Re-ranking procedure

After all applications have been scored, the Assessing Committee reviews the ranked applications. Re-ranking is possible on a case-by-case basis to address significant inconsistencies that materially affect the outcome.

Any Assessing Committee member may propose an application for re-ranking. If the whole committee agrees, the application's scores may be modified by adding up to 0.5 points to one or two scoring criteria to move the application up one place. The new ranking and adjusted total scores are then presented for consideration at the next stage. Scores cannot be added to an application's score without re-ranking the application. The re-ranking process is managed carefully by the Committee Chairs and the HRC Staff to avoid re-litigating applications and to prevent bias. Conflicts of Interest are notified and managed appropriately.

Re-ranking of other applications can be performed iteratively until a final ranked list is achieved. Any changes are recorded in the meeting scoresheet and notes.

2.5 Selection for the Full applications list

At the EOI Assessing Committee meeting, the applications are ranked according to the total score. The Assessing Committee then considers the ranked EOI and recommends those that should submit full applications. The recommendation of applications to be invited to the full stage is a quality decision that is made without consideration of or reference to the likely number of applications to be invited to the full stage.

In making this recommendation, the Assessing Committee draws a line on the ranked EOI list so that those below the line should not proceed to the full stage (NF) and all others should proceed to the full stage (F).

Statistical normalisation may be applied to minimise the effect of scoring variation between committees. Statistical normalisation calculates the z-score of a number using the mean and standard deviation of a distribution (Assessing Committee total scores) corrected for the mean and standard deviation of the larger distribution (all Assessing Committee total scores). The HRC, after considering the results from all Assessing Committee meetings, will prepare the final lists of full applications for General, Rangahau Hauora Māori, and Pacific Projects.

2.6 EOI Assessing Committee feedback

Applications that are triaged at pre-score stage will not receive committee feedback.

Applications that are discussed by an Assessing Committee will receive brief qualitative feedback in the review summary ([Appendix 3: EOI outcome and feedback](#)).

Individual outcomes will be available on HRC Gateway.

3. Assessment of Full applications

3.1 Assessing Committee membership

The Assessing Committee membership required to assess full applications may differ from the EOI Assessing Committee. Full applications will be assessed by a committee that may have extended expertise, members from the EOI Assessing Committee, and experts matched to the applications. Assessing Committee members will be provided with documents relating to the work of each committee. The number and membership of Assessing Committee depends on the scope of the applications, taking into account conflicts of interest, in consultation with the Chairs.

To minimise potential conflicts of interest, the following specific HRC guidance for Assessing Committee membership has been developed:

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; however, they may sit on or chair a different committee.

3.2 Before Full application Assessing Committee meeting

3.2.1 Reviewers

Reviewers (external reviewers and the CR1) score the full applications on a 7-point scale, provide comment and ask questions for each of the following criteria:

- Rationale for research
- Research design and methods
- Research impact
- Expertise and track record of the research team

The 7-point scale corresponds to a word ladder of descriptors:

Score	Criteria descriptor
7	Exceptional
6	Excellent
5	Very good
4	Good
3	Adequate
2	Unsatisfactory
1	Poor

Reviewer reports are available for applicants' rebuttals and are submitted on the HRC Gateway. Reviewer reports and applicant rebuttals are sent to the Assessing Committee prior to the meeting. The HRC aims to obtain 3-4 reviewer reports for each application. If this number is exceeded, additional reports will be cancelled on the following basis: where it is clear that a major conflict of interest (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 a fifth 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.

Note that the applicant rebuttal ([Appendix 4: Applicant rebuttal: Full project stage](#)) is an opportunity for the applicants to respond to the comments or questions raised by the reviewers. The applicants are advised to address the main issues raised by the reviewers, remain objective in addressing reviewers and avoid emotional responses. The applicant rebuttal, together with the reviewer reports will be made available for the Assessing Committee at their meetings.

Reviewer reports are anonymised for the applicants but are identifiable to the assessing committee.

3.2.2 Assessing Committee preliminary score

An optional Assessing Committee preliminary score may be applied by the HRC to identify poor applications when there is a need to limit the workload of the committee. Assessing Committee members, based on their own reading of the applications and informed by the reviewer reports and applicant rebuttals, allocate scores on the same 1-7 scale used at Assessing Committee meetings to all applications assigned to the committee.

The HRC collates the average scores to identify a preliminary ranking and help inform the order of discussion. Some of the lower ranked applications will be considered by the Chairs and Assessing Committee for triage, i.e. not discussed at the Assessing Committee meeting. However, when there is a marked scoring discrepancy for an application, it may be taken through to the meeting for full discussion.

The remaining applications will be randomised for order of discussion at the Assessing Committee meeting.

3.2.3 Applications not discussed at meeting

The two-stage application and assessment process limits the number of full applications received by the HRC so that it is expected that most or all applications will be discussed at the Assessing Committee meeting. However, it may be necessary to limit the number at this stage so that the Assessing Committee can focus on the most competitive applications. Pre-scores offer an overview of the quality and ranking of the research applications received, helping to determine which applications will not be discussed.

Reviewer reports and scores, applicant rebuttals and ranking based on pre-scores from committee members are considered by the Assessing Committee Chairs in determining whether all full applications will be assessed at the Assessing Committee meeting. Committee members may have input into this process.

3.3 Assessing Committee meeting procedure

The Chairs are responsible for ensuring assessments are fair and balanced. General discussion by all committee members is essential for a balanced committee opinion, not unduly influenced by one committee member and should not be cut short nor unduly extended.

Applications to be discussed by the assessing committee will be in random order.

The discussion time allocated to each application is 25-30 minutes, e.g.:

- declaration of conflicts of interest - 2 minutes
- CR1/CR2 comments - 5 minutes
- general discussion of the application - 15 minutes
- scoring - 2 minutes
- CR1 notes Review Summary points - 2 minutes.

3.4 Assessing Committee meeting scoring criteria: General Project category

In the Assessing Committee meeting, applications in the General category are scored from 1 to 7 against the same criteria used for EOI ([Appendix 2: Scoring criteria and anchor point descriptors](#)). These are listed below.

- Rationale for research
- Research design and methods
- Research impact
- Māori health advancement
- Expertise and track record of the research team.

The 7-point word ladder assists Assessing Committee scoring according to the descriptors rather than other considerations such as success rates of applications. Reviewers may only allocate whole scores.

Score	Criteria descriptor
7	Exceptional
6	Excellent
5	Very good
4	Good
3	Adequate
2	Unsatisfactory
1	Poor

The criteria are scored using a 7-point scale of equal weighting, as listed in the table, and that the total maximum score is 35.

Criteria	Points	% score
Rationale for research	7	20
Research design and methods	7	20
Research impact	7	20
Māori health advancement	7	20
Expertise and track record of the research team	7	20
Total	35	100

The Committee also takes into consideration and may make recommendations on:

- the appropriateness of the timeline for the proposed research
- the appropriateness of the milestones and objectives
- the appropriateness of the requested FTE involvement of the researchers and any direct costs requested, and
- the total cost of the research Project with respect to 'value for money'.

The HRC staff will provide the committee with information on how the budget aligns with HRC policy. However, it is the responsibility of the committee to determine whether the budget is appropriate for the application.

3.5 Scoring procedure

The scores are submitted via HRC Gateway and collated confidentially by the HRC staff.

3.6 Re-ranking procedure

After all applications have been scored, the Assessing Committee reviews the ranked applications. Re-ranking is possible on a case-by-case basis to address significant inconsistencies that materially affect the outcome.

Any Assessing Committee member may propose an application for re-ranking. If the whole committee agrees, the application's scores may be modified by adding up to 0.5 points to one or two scoring criteria to move the application up one place. The new ranking and adjusted total scores are then presented for consideration at the next stage.

The re-ranking process is managed carefully by the Committee Chairs and the HRC Staff to avoid re-litigating applications and to prevent bias. Conflicts of Interest are notified and managed appropriately.

Re-ranking of other applications can be performed iteratively until a final ranked list is achieved.

Any changes are recorded in the meeting scoresheet and notes.

Fundable and not fundable line

After scoring and re-ranking discussion, the applications are ranked according to the total score.

The committee, noting conflicts of interest, then:

- identifies the applications assessed as not fundable (NF), by starting at the bottom of the ranked list and going up the list based on quality
- identifies the applications assessed as fundable (F).

The Fundable/Not Fundable line refers to the position in the ranked list of applications below which all applications are of insufficient quality that, irrespective of available budget, they should not be funded.

Note: Once the applications have been scored following discussion by the Assessing Committee, scores cannot be further reviewed or adjusted. Any concerns about the process are identified by the committee and are taken by the Assessing Committee Chairs to the relevant Research Committee.

3.7 Score normalisation

If there are two or more Assessing Committee appointed to assess applications within a category, statistical normalisation will be applied to minimise the effect of scoring variation between committees. Statistical normalisation calculates the z-score of a number using the mean and standard deviation of a distribution (Assessing Committee total scores) corrected for the mean and standard deviation of the larger distribution (all Assessing Committee total scores). Projects and Programmes are included in the normalisation process.

3.8 Full Assessing Committee feedback

At the conclusion of the funding round, applicants receive a Full Assessing Committee review summary and can access their application outcome via HRC Gateway. The CR1 writes a brief review summary of the Assessing Committee discussion for each of their assigned applications ([Appendix 5: Full Assessing Committee review summary: Project application](#)). The intent of the review summary is to provide the applicant with a brief, balanced, objective statement of the committee's response to the research application.

Review summaries should be constructive and may include:

- key strengths of the application
- key areas for improvement and/or further consideration
- other comments (e.g. budgets, FTE, objectives).

Review summaries should not include any reference to scores or the identity of reviewers or Assessing Committee members.

The Assessing Committee Chairs are responsible for approving the content of all review summaries. The HRC is responsible for ensuring they are forwarded to research offices/the host organisation. Individual outcomes will be available on HRC Gateway.

4. Additional eligibility requirements

4.1 Eligibility restrictions on publicly funded research

As part of the New Zealand Government's broader response to Russia's continued assault on Ukraine, a new eligibility criterion has been implemented for government research funding.

For applications to be eligible, they must not benefit a Russian state institution (including but not limited to support for Russian military or security activity) or an organisation outside government that may be perceived as contributing to the war effort.

This is not a broad ban on collaborations with individual Russian researchers. The focus is on ensuring that government funding does not support scientific research collaborations that could further Russia's ability to continue its aggression in Ukraine.

As a Crown Agent investing in health research for the public good with taxpayer funding, the HRC reserves the right to make ineligible any application for funding that will provide benefit to a state institution or other organisation identified for exclusion by the New Zealand Government.

Appendix 2: Scoring criteria and anchor point descriptors

Criteria for assessing and scoring General Project applications by Assessing Committee

The same 7-point word ladder containing criteria descriptors is considered against each of the following assessment outlines below (listed A-E).

Note:

- The “Adequate” anchor point is 3 points.
- Applicants do not necessarily have to address all the points in the outlines below; they are included to help guide assessment under each of the scoring categories.

Score	Criteria descriptor
7	Exceptional
6	Excellent
5	Very good
4	Good
3	Adequate
2	Unsatisfactory
1	Poor

Criteria	Points	% score
Rationale for research	7	20
Research design and methods	7	20
Research impact	7	20
Māori health advancement	7	20
Expertise and track record of the research team	7	20
Total	35	100

A. Rationale for research

The research is important, worthwhile, and justifiable to New Zealand, with consideration to the international context, because it addresses some or all of the following:

- it addresses a significant health issue that is important for health/society
- the aims, research questions and hypotheses build on existing knowledge and address a knowledge gap
- the research findings should be original and innovative.

B. Research design and methods

The study has been well designed to answer the research questions because it demonstrates some or all the following:

- comprehensive and feasible study design that is achievable within the timeframe
- appropriate study design to address the objectives of the research
- awareness of statistical considerations/technical or population issues/practicalities
- evidence of availability of materials/samples
- culturally appropriate methodology
- sound data management and data monitoring arrangements
- patient safety issues are well managed.

C. Research impact

The proposed research is likely to add value and benefit New Zealand because:

- Applicants have described a credible pathway for how their research will:
 - result in benefits or opportunities for future research in NZ, or
 - influence policy, practice, or health services or technologies in NZ, leading to improved health or other social/economic impacts.
- The research team are undertaking steps to maximise the likelihood of impact beyond the productions of knowledge (as appropriate to the context of the research) and have the necessary skills, networks and experience to achieve this.

D. Māori health advancement

The proposed research is likely to advance Māori health because:

- Applicants have provided a description of how their research could lead to improved Māori health or reductions in health inequity over time.
- The research team are undertaking activities to address Māori health advancement, as appropriate to the nature and scope of the research. This may include, but is not limited to, activities such as:
 - establishing meaningful, collaborative, and reciprocal relationships with Māori
 - undertaking research that addresses Māori health need and inequity
 - forming appropriate research teams
 - developing current and future workforce capacity and capability including upskilling of research team members, and
 - adhering to culturally appropriate research practices and principles (as appropriate to the context of the research).

E. Expertise and track record of the research team

The team, relative to opportunity, have the ability to achieve the proposed outcomes and impacts because they have demonstrated:

- appropriate qualifications and experience
- right mix of expertise, experience and FTEs, including consideration of capacity building
- capability to perform research in current research environment
- networks/collaborations
- history of productivity and delivery on previous research funding.

Appendix 3: EOI outcome and feedback

The number of applications and the relatively short time available makes extensive feedback to applicants difficult. If the EOI application is triaged, applicants will be informed that based on Assessing Committee pre-scores, their application was not discussed at the Assessing Committee meeting. If the EOI application is discussed at the Assessing Committee meeting, the review summary will briefly reflect the Assessing Committee discussion and focus on key strengths and potential areas for improvement, which may aid completing the full application.

EOI Assessing Committee review summary

HRC reference #		Applicant surname	
Title of research			
Host			

Applicants who have been invited to submit a full application must note that responding to or addressing the points noted in this review summary does not mean that the full application will be funded.

*Note to committee reviewers (CR): Please use **brief bullet points** and give careful consideration to the information and wording provided below as it will be useful for both applicants progressing to the full application stage (in helping to shape their research) and for unsuccessful applicants (in preparing future research applications). Comments should be clearly worded, reflect the panel's discussion, and ideally be no more than one-page or 5-6 bullet points total. Please delete this text before you submit the completed form to the HRC.*

With regard to the criteria for assessing and scoring research applications:

- 1. The Assessing Committee noted the following key strengths of the application**

- 2. The Assessing Committee noted the following aspects that could be improved and/or considered further**

- 3. Other Comments/suggestions**

Appendix 4: Applicant rebuttal: Full project stage

Applicant surname		HRC reference #	
Funding round		Due date	
Title of research			

Instructions (delete after reading): Project application rebuttal has a 2-page limit, which includes references. Do not change the default margins and font (size 11), although you should use bold and underlining for emphasis. Try to leave spaces to improve legibility. Please ensure you address all the issues raised by reviewers and remain objective in your response.

This form is provided on Gateway.

Appendix 5: Full Assessing Committee review summary: Project application

HRC reference #		Applicant surname	
Title of research			
Host			

*Note to committee reviewers (CR): Please use **brief bullet points** and give careful consideration to the information and wording provided below as it will be useful for both successful applicants (in helping to shape their research) and for unsuccessful applicants (in preparing future research applications). Comments should be clearly worded, reflect the committee’s discussion, and ideally be no more than one-page or 4-6 bullet points total. Please delete this text before you submit the completed form to the HRC.*

With regard to the criteria for assessing and scoring research applications:

- 1. The Assessing Committee noted the following key strengths of the application**

- 2. The Assessing Committee noted the following aspects that could be improved and/or considered further**

- 3. Other Comments/suggestions (e.g. budgets, FTE, objectives)**