

## Questions received at the Introduction to HRC Webinar 28 May, 2025

Below, are the responses to questions received from attendees at the Introduction to HRC Webinar held on 28 May, 2025.

Questions have been grouped by high level area and similar questions have been consolidated.

If you have any further questions, please speak to your research office in the first instance. If you do not have a research office, please contact us on [info@hrc.govt.nz](mailto:info@hrc.govt.nz).

HRC contracts are held with host institutions, rather than individual researchers, therefore please factor in internal deadlines and processes prior to HRC deadlines.

### ***Early career researchers (ECRs)***

#### **1. I am curious about early career researchers seeking funding, and how best to build a team to apply for funding? Not just to support the ECRs applying, but also what the review committees look for in staff make up?**

The assessing committee will consider a range of factors in their assessment of the team make up. It is advised that applicants review the score criteria for the grant they are applying for, available in the application guidelines. While not an exhaustive list, the score criterion descriptors provide useful indications of what the assessing committees will consider in their assessment of the applications. For grants aimed at early career researchers, such as PhD, master's or postdoctoral fellowships, the assessing committee will consider whether the proposed supervisors have the necessary academic and cultural expertise to guide the applicant throughout the research. For Emerging Researcher First Grants, the applicant should describe the mentorship they will receive throughout the project. They also need to identify parts of the project they will have responsibility over to develop an independent research programme.

For all grants, applicants should provide evidence that the team have the required skillset to achieve the proposed research objectives. Additionally, if a team member is acting in a mentoring only capacity, this should be clearly articulated in the application.

#### **2. Can early career researchers without a PhD but who have a master's and are members of research teams, apply for the Emerging Researcher First Grants?**

Yes, they can. For the Emerging Researcher First Grants, applicants are required to have a postgraduate degree, which can include a master's. For alternative postgraduate degrees, we will accept qualifications that are a Level 9 or 10 qualification or above as per the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework, as these are equivalent to postgraduate degrees. In addition to eligibility,

applicants should provide justification of their suitability and research abilities to be assessed by the assessing committee.

For other grants, please refer to the application guidelines i.e. Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants are required to hold a PhD for no more than five years.

### **3. How do you calculate the years after PhD and are career breaks considered?**

Yes, career breaks are considered when calculating years since PhD (or most recent postgraduate degree). This includes parental leave, caring responsibilities, career breaks, ill health, or other justified reasons, which should be included in your CV. Time spent working in a career other than research is not considered a justified reason. Eligibility will be counted from the date of degree conferment.

### **4. Is the postdoctoral fellowship applicable only for Māori and Pacific for this round. Would you mind confirming this? Or is it eligible for the general applicant, as well?**

Yes, Postdoctoral Fellowships are only available in the Māori and Pacific Career Development (CDA) streams. However, the General CDA stream offers other fellowships such as the Hercus and Girdlers, Clinical Practitioner and Foxley Fellowships.

If these fellowships are not aligned with your research, our Emerging Researcher First Grants may be a good fit for you. Emerging Researcher First Grants open later in the year (usually between August – October).

## ***General Guidance***

### **5. Is there funding for projects that work directly with health providers?**

The Health Delivery round is most aligned with health providers and HRC currently offers projects and career development awards in this space. The HRC does not match up research with health care providers or provide a list of providers. In the project round for all our funding streams, applicants can collaborate with researchers at health care providers also and this team composition would be assessed by the committee.

### **6. Can an application be submitted to two rounds e.g. Health Delivery and Rangahau Hauora Māori?**

Yes, but each round will have specific goals that are quite different that will likely not be met by submitting the exact same proposal. We advise to check your eligibility in the first instance to see if the round aligns with your research. Also note that a First Named Investigator cannot submit two proposals within the same round.

### **7. Can you please unpack "must improve health outcomes" a little. How does fundamental research with longer term impact sit within this framework?**

All research is assessed by peers on assessing committees. It is intended assessing committees are diverse with round table expertise. Each discipline will be scored in a context dependent manner and on the stage of the research pipeline. Provide a realistic description of how research findings could contribute to improved health outcomes over time (a 'line of sight' or 'pathway' to impact. Fundamental biomedical research must have a line of sight to improving health outcomes but not necessarily within the scope of a short Project Grant. The committee must be assured the research team is doing everything in their capability to move research along the pipeline. Please refer to the [HRC's Research Impact Slideshow](#) for further guidance.

**8. Sometimes applications that are rejected are informed it is because they don't meet a particular criterion. How do applicants get more information about the specifics of the criteria?**

The round scope and assessment criteria for each grant type are detailed in the application guidelines or the Request for Proposals documentation (if an RFP). These goals and assessment criteria are what is used by the assessing committee to score each proposal.

**9. Are letters of support from end users for Project Grant applications required?**

Yes, this is always encouraged to provide the assessing committee with evidence of feasibility that the work and collaboration will go ahead. A letter of support does not need to be a formal letter, it could be a memorandum of understanding or a screenshot of an email etc.

**10. Specific to the assessment process overview slide. Can the HRC explain the step that involves triage before assessing committee? Is the application not scored if triaged out at this point? It would be useful to have transparency around this step and individual feedback as to reasons why this decision was made. Could scores be made available if scored?**

Due to large volumes of proposals, some assessing committees will prescore proposals individually and independently prior to an assessment committee meeting to shortlist what will be discussed at the meeting. HRC has numerous assessing committees, and each is tailored to the proposals under consideration. Those with the lowest total average ranked scores are declined and not discussed by the committee, leaving greater time to discuss those that are more likely to be fundable, but which may have flaws that could be strengthened. All proposals discussed at a committee meeting will receive review summary feedback in bullet point form.

Not all committees prescore and triage proposals. HRC will consider if it will be possible to share prescore and triage outcomes and or information other than scores could be shared with applicants in the future.

**11. Are there any concessions that can be made for researchers who do not have permanent residency yet, but are permanently employed with an Accredited Employer Work Visa?**

As outlined in the HRC rules document, if you are applying as the 'first named investigator', who is the lead researcher, on an application, you must have New Zealand as your principle domicile (means holding of New Zealand citizenship, or a residence class visa under the Immigration Act, 2009 and either be domiciled or residing in New Zealand with the intention of residing here indefinitely, having done so for the immediately preceding 12 months. According to Section 4 of the Immigration Act, "residence class visa" means a permanent resident visa or a resident visa) and your principal place of employment. Note, if you are a 'named investigator', who is a researcher on an application, you can be a New Zealand resident, a researcher on a work visa in New Zealand or a researcher from an organisation outside of New Zealand who is part of the research team. Overheads will not be provided to overseas institutions.

**12. Given the current eligibility criteria for the principal investigator to have permanent residency, many early-career researchers are currently not eligible and are missing out on this opportunity. As we work to establish and grow in our field, is there any possibility that the criteria might be expanded in the near future to include professions like ours, just having NZ residency?**

Not at this point. Please refer to the HRC rules document.

**13. Are sample guidelines/documentation available when a round isn't open?**

We usually have the previous year's Guidelines on HRC Gateway until the next round opens, and it will be removed. The application form, however, is removed. We can make this available, but they are old documents. Note, you must use the updated/current round documents to submit your application. Please liaise with your research office and check HRC Gateway for the updated documents.

**14. Would the assessment criteria be made available to the researchers? For example, scoring systems.**

They are available in all Guidelines as an appendix or outlined in the RFP.

**15. How do we get a new field added to health professional roles - ie medical laboratory scientist is not on the drop-down list?**

We will discuss with our IT team. Please send any further required roles to [info@hrc.govt.nz](mailto:info@hrc.govt.nz)

**16. How many grants are awarded yearly? Is there a number you aim for? What's the success rate?**

The number of grants awarded varies from year to year. We don't have a set number we aim for. We have approximately \$107 million annually for health research investment allocated across different grant types. We have just under 1,000 health research contracts under active management currently. Those are grants awarded in the last three to five years and that gives you an indication of the numbers we are funding. We have a certain funding allocation, and we will allocate funding until the

budget is exhausted. Every year we are oversubscribed, so there are more applications that are deemed fundable than we have funding for.

**17. Last year's application guidelines for the project grant round states, "early and mid-career researchers who have not previously held a project contract are encouraged to apply as co-first named investigator with a mentor/experienced researcher". Does this mean that such researchers would be ill-advised to apply as first named investigator (even if with an experienced mentor and co-first named investigator to support them)?**

No. Provided you have the required skills, experience and expertise, meet all the requirements and are supported by a team that has the appropriate skills for the proposed research, you can apply as the first named investigator. Co-first named investigators is an option also if you feel that your proposed research will be stronger with a co-first named investigator to mentor and support you or who may have complementary skills and expertise. Named investigators with a time-only mentorship role should be clearly outlined to assessing committees.

**18. What happens if the postdoctoral researcher's contract ends before the application is submitted? Can they still apply through the experienced principal investigator?**

You need to talk to your research office and get an agreement that they will host your postdoctoral research before you apply. You must submit your application to the research office, who submit to the HRC on your behalf.

**19. What is HRCs perspective on international research team applications?**

While HRC is supportive of international researchers as named investigators in principle (provided the requirements around residency and domicile for the primary investigator are met and as outlined in the HRC rules), applicants are asked to consider whether the relevant research expertise is present in New Zealand in the first instance. The HRC does not contribute to the overhead of overseas investigators. The total proportion of the contract budget allocated to overseas investigators must not exceed 20% for projects and 10% for programmes.

The impact to health outcomes in New Zealand must be clear to the committee. International collaborators can bring a great wealth of expertise and knowledge to a team. Letters of support from collaborators are encouraged.

***New Zealand Health Delivery***

**20. Will there be Health Delivery Research Activation Grants this year?**

No, Research Activation Grants are not available this year.

**21. Will there be Health Delivery Research Career Development Awards this year?**

Yes, this is currently open on the HRC Gateway.

**22. Now that Activation Grants are no longer offered, is there any plan to bring in mid-sized grants to develop skills and capacity BEFORE going for the larger health delivery and project grants?**

The HRC actively review funding models to identify gaps that could be addressed. Researchers are reminded that applications for Project Grants do not have to be for the maximum fundable amounts. The committees will consider budget vs deliverables while making their assessments.

***Delays and timelines***

**23. Is there a new timeframe you can share for opening and closing deadlines for this year's 2026 Project Grants?**

Dates for the 2026 round will be announced soon. Please refer to HRC communication channels such as HRC Gateway and HRC Update for information.

**24. Would there be a HRC Project Grant round this year?**

Yes.

**25. When are the people-focused funding streams being opened?**

Please refer to the HRC Gateway for the most up to date information on round dates. The General Career Development Award (CDA) stream applications closed on 2 July 2025. The Māori, Pacific and Health Delivery CDA streams close on 23 July 2025.