



NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Peer Review Guidelines

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Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
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1 INTRODUCTION

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for managing the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research in a manner consistent with Commonwealth legislation, guidelines and policies. NHMRC has a responsibility to ensure taxpayers' funds are invested appropriately to support the best health and medical research. Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation, guidelines and policies
- how to declare and manage conflicts of interest, and
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Guidelines which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.
- [*Policy on the Disclosure of Interests requirements for prospective and appointed NHMRC committee members*](#) (Section 39 Committees). This Policy outlines peer reviewers' responsibilities in order to ensure all disclosures of interests are addressed in a rigorous and transparent way throughout the period of a peer reviewer's participation in NHMRC Committees.

2 KEY CHANGES

Applicants should note the following significant changes for the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020:

- Grant Review Panel meetings will no longer routinely be held to discuss applications. NHMRC may convene an assessor videoconference to discuss applications by exception.
- Peer reviewers will be able to seek clarification on peer review policies and processes during the assessment phase from an Independent Chair.

3 PRINCIPLES, CONDUCT AND OBLIGATIONS DURING PEER REVIEW

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of peer reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

3.1 NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review

NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) are high-level, guiding statements that underpin all NHMRC's peer review processes, and include:

- **Fairness.** Peer review processes are fair and seen to be fair by all.

- **Transparency.** Applies to all stages of peer review.
- **Independence.** Peer reviewers provide independent advice. There is also independent oversight of peer review processes by independent Chairs and Observers.
- **Appropriateness and balance.** There is appropriate experience, expertise and representation of peer reviewers assessing applications.
- **Research community participation.** Persons holding taxpayer-funded grants should willingly make themselves available to participate in peer review processes, whenever possible, in accordance with the obligations in the Funding Agreement.
- **Confidentiality.** Participants respect that confidentiality is important to the fairness and robustness of peer review.
- **Impartiality.** Peer review is objective and impartial, with appropriate processes in place to manage disclosures of interest.
- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

Additional details underpinning the Principles can be found at [Appendix A](#).

3.2 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

The [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) (the Code) requires researchers participating in peer review do so in a way that is ‘fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content’.

The Code is supported by additional supplementary guidance, including [Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#).

3.3 Disclosures of Interest

3.3.1 What is an interest?

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests¹ of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with Part 5, section 42A of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act) and sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*² (made under the subsection 29(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2013* (PGPA Act)).

In particular, under:

- subsection 42A(3) of the NHMRC Act, peer reviewers of Council and Committees must “give to the CEO a written statement of any interest the peer reviewer has that may relate to the activity of the Council or Committee” before starting to hold office. “Interest” is defined in section 4 of the NHMRC Act as meaning “any direct or indirect, pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest.”
- section 29 of the PGPA Act, “an official... who has a material personal interest that relates to the

¹ An “Interest” is defined in section 4 of the NHMRC Act as meaning “any direct or indirect, pecuniary or non-pecuniary, interest”. Under section 29 of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), “an official ... who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest”.

² Made under subsection 29(2) of the PGPA Act.

affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest”. This obligation (unlike the obligation in subsection 42A(3) of the NHMRC Act) is ongoing and not limited to a particular point in time.

For the purposes of this document, the terms “material personal interest” and “interest” are regarded as interchangeable, and whilst the term “interest/s” has been used for ease of reading, this policy includes guidance on each.

Although many positives may emerge from collaborations and partnerships with industry, there is potential for conflicts of interest to arise. These conflicts may arise from competing commitments and Financial Interests that may, or may be perceived to affect scientific endeavours.

3.3.2 What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)?

A CoI exists when there is a divergence between professional responsibilities (as a peer reviewer) and personal interests. Such conflicts have the potential to lead to biased advice affecting objectivity and impartiality. By managing any conflict, NHMRC maintains the integrity in its processes in the assessment of scientific and technical merit of the application.

For NHMRC peer review purposes, interests may fall into the broad domains of:

- Involvement with the application under review
- Working relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Social relationships or associations
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Financial relationships or interests
- Other relevant interests or relationships

For further information peer reviewers should consult the NHMRC [*Policy on the Disclosure of Interests Requirements for Prospective and Appointed NHMRC Committee Members*](#) (Section 39 Committees).

Researchers frequently have a CoI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under consideration. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

An outline of potential CoI situations and guidance is provided for peer reviewers at [Attachment B](#).

3.3.3 Disclosure of Interests in the Peer Review Process

Peer reviewers must identify and disclose interests they may have with any of the Chief Investigators (CIs) and Associate Investigators (AIs) on applications they will be reviewing. After appointment as a peer reviewer, but before assessing any applications, peer reviewers are required to disclose their interests in writing. While disclosures of interest must be declared at the beginning of the peer review process, new or previously unrecognised disclosures of interest must be declared at any stage of the peer review process. Declarations must include details that substantiate when collaborations occurred (i.e. month and year). NHMRC will use these details to verify and determine the level of conflict. Any peer reviewer who has an interest that is determined by NHMRC to have a ‘high’ CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of the Chair.

3.3.4 Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer's appointment under section 44B of the NHMRC Act (section 44B also covers failure to comply with section 29 of the PGPA Act).

It is important for peer reviewers to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process. Accordingly, peer reviewers are encouraged to consult the Secretariat if they are uncertain about any disclosure of interest matter.

3.4 Freedom of Information (Fol)

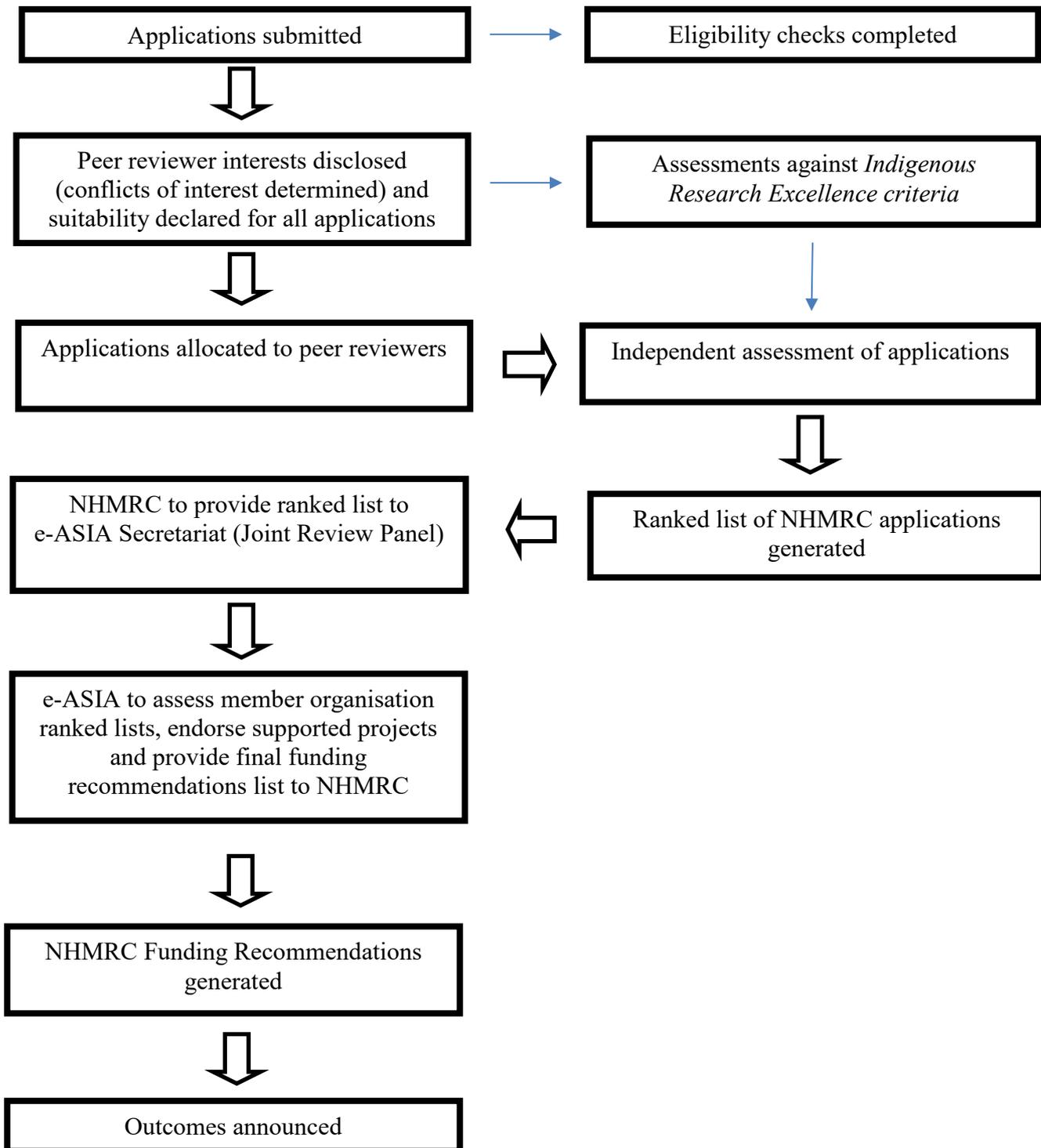
NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, the FOI process includes consultation and exemptions. NHMRC endeavours to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

3.5 Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the [NHMRC website](#).

NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 PEER REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 Overview of the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 peer review process



Date	Activity*
21 May 2020	Deadline for NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 application submission
1 June 2020	Application eligibility review and confirmation
8 June 2020	Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications
8-19 June 2020	Indigenous assessments obtained
1 July 2020	Allocations of applications for peer review**
1-29 July 2020	Peer reviewers to review application and submit scores against NHMRC e-ASIA JRP 2020 Grant Opportunity assessment criteria, for each application
30 July-7 August	NHMRC to convene teleconference panel (if required)
10-21 August	NHMRC to prepare ranked list of the applications for the e-ASIA Joint Review Panel
24-26 August 2020	e-ASIA Joint Review Panel to assess applications and provide final list of e-ASIA endorsed fundable projects to NHMRC
September 2020	Funding Recommendations generated
30 November 2020	Notification of outcomes ***

*The NHMRC e-ASIA JRP 2020 Grant Opportunity peer review process may be subject to change without prior notice. In this case, NHMRC will endeavour to notify affected applicants.

**There are four call topic areas within the NHMRC e-ASIA JRP 2020 Grant Opportunity, applications within each call topic will be reviewed by peer reviewers with relevant expertise.

***Date is indicative and subject to change.

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 3.3 *Reviewing NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 applications*.

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 peer review process are identified in the table below.

NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Peer Review Participants Table

Roles	Responsibilities
Independent Chair (Chair)	<p>The Chair's role is to ensure NHMRC's procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being reviewed by peer reviewers.</p> <p>Chairs do not assess applications, however they must manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide. Chairs may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with NHMRC e-ASIA JRP 2020 Grant Opportunity applications • ensure NHMRC procedures are followed • record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice, and • assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ promoting good engagement by peer reviewers in all assessments ○ guiding peer reviewers when they consider 'relative to opportunity',

	<p>including career disruptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ advising peer reviewers that assessments should lead to an outcome where applications are appropriately considered against the NHMRC-e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C and D) ○ guiding peer reviewers when they consider the assessment against the <i>Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria</i> for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus <p>Chairs may need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● review assessor application statement summaries for inappropriate, biased or defamatory comments.
Assistant Chair	<p>Assistant Chair's role is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● assist the Chair with their duties and in providing guidance to peer reviewers ● identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they may have with applications to be reviewed by the panel ● familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff ● ensure NHMRC's procedures are followed ● record reasons for adjusting the proposed budgets, and ● ensure that budget comments are consistent for all applications and inform the Chair if inconsistencies arise. <p>Assistant Chairs may need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● review assessor application statement summaries for inappropriate, biased or defamatory comments.
Peer reviewers	<p>Peer Reviewers need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff ● identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel ● provide a fair and impartial assessment against the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C & D) for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner ● assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable ● assess the proposed budgets and ensure that the individual elements of the budget are appropriate for the project and fully justified. ● consider the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Appendix E) provided for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus. ● Write a brief summary of their assessment of each application assigned to them, including comments which can (upon request) be provided to applicants. Peer reviewers will be provided guidance for developing qualitative comments (Attachment H)
Senior NHMRC Staff	NHMRC staff with appropriate expertise may be involved in:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing allocation of applications to peer reviewers • assisting and advising on the peer review process.
NHMRC Staff	<p>Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities.</p> <p>NHMRC staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite individuals to participate as peer reviewers or as Chair • determine whether disclosed interests pose a conflict and the level of that conflict. • act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers • provide briefings to peer reviewers • determine eligibility of applications • assign applications to peer reviewers • support the operation of NHMRC’s granting system • assist the Chair in responding to peer reviewer enquiries • ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application • seek feedback from peer reviewers and community observers on improvements for future processes.
Indigenous health research peer reviewers	<p>Indigenous health research peer reviewers will review how well each application addresses NHMRC’s Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Attachment E).</p> <p>Indigenous health research external assessors will not participate in scoring. They will act as external experts and provide guiding comments to the peer reviewers relating to the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria.</p>

4.3 Reviewing NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 applications

All NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 applications are assessed against the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 *Assessment Criteria* and the associated *Category Descriptors* at [Attachments C and D](#). Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 4.3.1) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at [Attachment E](#).

4.3.1 Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health will be identified by information provided in the application. Researchers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will check whether these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* ([Attachment E](#)) from an assessor with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. For further information on assessing applications that have a focus on the health

of Indigenous Australians, see *Guidance for Assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* at [Attachment F](#).

4.3.2 Receipt and initial processing of applications

NHMRC staff will verify that NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process.

4.3.3 Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with an overview of applications and will disclose their interests in accordance with the guidelines provided at *Section 3.3* and [Appendix B](#).

Some peer reviewers may have a disclosure of interest for which they require a decision. For these, NHMRC will assess the information provided by the peer reviewer and specify a level of peer review participation for the peer reviewer.

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of suitability for applications, based on the information available to them in the application summary.

Taking into account potential CoIs and suitability, peer reviewers will be assigned to applications.

4.3.4 Assignment of applications to peer reviewers

As NHMRC is participating in four call topic areas for the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020, each call topic will have its own stream of peer reviewers. Applications, as streamlined via call topic area through NHMRC's grant management system will automatically be assigned to the relevant call topic peer review streams.

Taking into account CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications to relevant peer reviewers. It is expected that each peer reviewer will be assigned approximately six applications. However, this is subject to change, depending on the number and peer review area of applications. Each application will be assigned up to five reviewers.

4.3.5 Briefing

NHMRC will provide briefing material that will provide peer reviewers further details on their duties and responsibilities associated with the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Further information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process.

4.3.6 Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high COI exists) and will assess all assigned applications specifically against the assessment criteria (at [Appendix D](#)), and allocate scores, using the category descriptors, taking into account career disruption and other 'relative to opportunity' considerations ([Appendix G](#)), where applicable.

Peer reviewers will be able to seek clarification from the Independent Chair on peer review policies and processes during the assessment phase. Peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers before scoring an application. This is to ensure peer reviewers provide independent scores. Peer reviewers are required to provide a brief summary of their assessment for each application they assess, summarising the strengths and weaknesses of the application. Peer reviewers must remember their obligation to remain fair and impartial when providing their feedback to applicants.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores and application summaries are completed by the nominated due date. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements.

NHMRC will consider convening an assessor videoconference to explore any significant divergence in scores or strong comments provided by assessors. If a meeting is convened, all stream reviewers who assessed the relevant application(s) will discuss and have the opportunity to revise their score if they wish. Should no videoconference be required, the score from the ranked list will be considered the final assessment score.

Peer reviewers' final scores will be consolidated and used to create (stream specific) ranked lists that NHMRC will use to identify and present fundable projects to the e-ASIA Joint Review Panel.

4.3.6.1 Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must take into account productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations in the assessment of all applications. This reflects NHMRC's policy that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant's track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including consideration as to whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions are provided at [Attachment G](#).

4.3.6.2 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers are to take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field, when assessing the publication component of an applicant's track record. Track record assessment takes into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published.

It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors.

The [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#) (DoRA) makes recommendations for improving the evaluation of research assessment. NHMRC is a signatory to DoRA and adheres to the recommendations outlined in DoRA for its peer review processes.

4.3.6.4 Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

Peer reviewers are required to consider the general strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design of the proposal to ensure robust and unbiased results. Assessment of the experimental design should include consideration of the following, as appropriate:

- scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal)
- techniques to be used

- details for appropriate blinding (during allocation, assessment and analysis)
- strategies for randomisation
- details and justification for control groups
- effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study (where appropriate)
- consideration of relevant experimental variables, and
- sex and gender elements of the research to maximise impact and any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

4.3.6.5 Research Integrity Issues

The peer review process can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues with applicants (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information) or the behaviour of other peer reviewers. NHMRC has established specific processes for addressing research integrity concerns that arise in peer review. Peer reviewers must not discuss their concerns with other peer reviewers as this may jeopardise the fair assessment of an application. Instead, these issues should be raised with NHMRC separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed is provided on the [NHMRC website](#).

Applications that are the subject of a research misconduct allegation will continue to progress through NHMRC peer review processes while any investigations are ongoing. NHMRC liaises with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation and, if necessary, will take action under the *NHMRC Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy* available on the [NHMRC website](#).

4.3.6.6 Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Peer reviewers must not contact applicants about their application under review. If this occurs, the peer reviewer may be removed from the process, and there is the potential for exclusion from future NHMRC peer review.

Where an applicant contacts a peer reviewer, the relevant application may be excluded from consideration.

In either case, contact between applicants and peer reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

4.3.7 Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a condition of funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a rare event. When this does occur, peer reviewers will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and ensure conditions are unambiguous and able to be assessed.

CoFs relate to the awarding of funding, the continuation of funding or the level of funding. They do not relate to conditions which affect either eligibility to apply or subsequent peer review.

The principles are:

- NHMRC seeks to minimise the administrative burden on researchers and Administering Institutions.

- CoFs must not relate to the competitiveness of an application (e.g. project requires more community engagement); these issues should be considered during peer review and be reflected in the scores for the application.
- Any CoFs must be clear and measurable, so that the condition can be readily assessed as having been met.

4.3.8 e-ASIA Joint Review Panel

After the applications have been assessed, application scores are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to identify fundable projects which may be submitted to the e-ASIA Joint Review Panel and assessed in combination with participating International Agencies assessing of the applications. The e-ASIA Joint Review Panel will then provide a ranked list to the e-ASIA Board for funding endorsement. Endorsed fundable projects will then be communicated to relevant e-ASIA member organisations.

4.3.9 Funding Recommendations

Funding recommendations of e-ASIA endorsed fundable projects will be presented to NHMRC's Research Committee and Council for advice to the CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health.

4.3.10 Notification of Outcomes

Applicants will be notified of the outcomes via NHMRC's granting system and their Administering Institution's Research Administration Officer.

Appendix A - Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

Fairness

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the [NHMRC website](#). All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website and/or via [GrantConnect](#).
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.³

Independence

- The order of merit determined by peer review panels is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded ‘below the funding line’ in priority or strategic areas.
- Panel Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application before that panel. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC’s processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

Appropriateness and balance

- Peer reviewers are selected to meet the program’s objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that panels are constituted with an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

³ Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.

Confidentiality

- NHMRC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition NHMRC is bound by the provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 in relation to its collections and use of personal information, and by the commercial confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act.
- Peer reviewers are to treat applications in-confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process.
- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers in the peer review process are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.
- NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

Impartiality

- Peer reviewers must disclose all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect objectivity in considering particular applications.
- Panel members must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, or with grants being reviewed by other panel members, including:
 - research collaborations
 - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
 - employment arrangements
 - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, undermine fair and impartial judgement.
- Disclosures of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in decision making on relevant applications.

Quality and Excellence

- NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its peer review processes.
- Any significant change will be developed in consultation with the research community and may involve piloting new processes.
- NHMRC will strive to introduce new technologies that are demonstrated to maximise the benefits of peer review and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process while minimising individual workloads.
- NHMRC will undertake post-program assessment of all its schemes with feedback from the sector.
- NHMRC will provide advice, training and feedback for peer reviewers new to NHMRC peer review.
- Where NHMRC finds peer reviewers to be substandard in their performance, NHMRC may provide such feedback directly to the peer reviewer or their institution.

Appendix B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Disclosures of Interest

Conflicts frequently are regarded as a positive indicator that peer reviewers are recognised leaders who:

- have expert advice or skills
- have been given professional opportunities
- have received government funding, and
- are supported by the companies working to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia.

A disclosure of interest does not mean that a peer reviewer has engaged in an inappropriate activity. It is a collaboration which may, or could be perceived to, impact impartial peer review and thus needs to be disclosed and transparently managed (where necessary) to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process. It is the peer reviewer's responsibility to disclose all interests. Failure to do so without a reasonable excuse may result in the peer reviewer being removed from the panel in accordance with subsection 44B(3) of the NHMRC Act.

In determining if an interest is a conflict, peer reviewers should give consideration to the following values that underpin the robust nature of peer review:

- **Excellence through expert peer review:** The benefits of peer reviewers' expert advice need to be balanced with the risk of real and or perceived interests affecting an impartial review.
- **Significance:** Not all interests are equal. The type of interest needs to be considered in terms of its significance and time when it occurred.
- **Integrity through disclosure:** Peer review rests on the integrity of peer reviewers to disclose any interests and contribute to transparently managing any real or perceived conflicts in a rigorous way. The peer review system cannot be effective without trusting peer reviewers' integrity.

In determining if an interest is a 'High', 'Low', or 'No' CoI, the responsibility is on the peer reviewer to consider the specific circumstances of the situation. This includes:

- the interest's significance
- its impact on the impartiality of the reviewer, and
- maintaining the integrity of the peer review process.

Once a peer reviewer discloses a conflict they can detail a brief explanation of the disclosure of interest in NHMRC's granting system to enable accurate clarification for decisions. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are encouraged to provide sufficient detail in the explanation such as date (month and year) of collaborations. Disclosures of interest where appropriate are to be documented for conflicts with both CIs and AIs.

The written declaration of interest is retained for auditing purposes by NHMRC. The details below provide generalist examples but are not to be regarded as a prescriptive checklist

HIGH Interest

Situation		Example
Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)	✓	Peer reviewer is a CI or AI on the application under review.
	✓	Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer has collaborated, in a significant way, on publications within the last three calendar years (co-authorship), pending current-round applications, existing NHMRC or other grants.
	✓	There is a direct association/collaboration between the peer reviewer and a member of the CI team that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in this research.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation, or is negotiating for employment at the applicant's institution, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the same research field at an independent Medical Research Institute. • in the same Department or School of a university. • in the same Department of a hospital.
	✓	Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within an organisation, or with a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
	✓	Peer reviewer would benefit if the proposal was successful as an associate of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc. For example, a board of the hospital in which the research would be conducted.
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer's organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations that may have, or may be perceived to have, vested interest in the research. For example, a pharmaceutical company has provided drugs for testing and therefore has a vested interest in the outcome.
Social relationship and / or interests	✓	The peer reviewer has a known personal/social/perceived relationship with a CI on the application.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer has taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI, within the last three years.
Direct financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has the potential for financial gains if the application is successful, such as, benefits from: payments from resulting patents, supply of goods and services, access to facilities, and provision of cells/animals as part of the collaboration.

	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with relevant company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer has had an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with the applicant/s. This may still be ruled high if the events in question occurred beyond the last three years.
	✓	The peer reviewer feels that there are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence, the peer review process

LOW Interest

Situation		Example
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than three years ago.
	✓	Within the last three years the peer reviewer has published with the CI as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥ 10) where the peer reviewer did not have a major professional interactive role (i.e. the peer reviewer's role was a leadership role).
	✓	A co-worker is planning future collaborations with a CI.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a named AI on the application are actively or have previously collaborated within the last three years.
	✓	Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a contributor of the research team have shared cells/animals/reagents/specialist expertise (biostatistician) etc. but have no other connection to each other.
	✓	Collaboration between a CI and the peer reviewer's research group.
	✓	Peer reviewer is considering/planning/or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but have no current collaborations or joint applications.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation or is negotiating employment at the applicant's institution
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at the same institution and do not know each other. • in the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments and do not know each other. • in the same organisation, but the peer reviewer or applicant holds an honorary appointment.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI work for two organisations that are affiliated but there is/are no direct association/collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc., but otherwise have no association that would constitute a High decision.
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer's organisation is affiliated with the CI's organisation.
	✓	Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a 'High' decision.
	✓	When the peer reviewer's institution has an indirect affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in this research. For example, peer reviewer is employed at a large institution that does not have a direct research interest/association with the organisation(s) in question.
Social relationship	✓	Peer reviewer's partner or an immediate family member have a known personal/social (non-work)/perceived relationship with a CI on the

and / or interests		application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI that would be perceived or constitute a ‘High’ decision.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI, or the peer reviewer’s research was supervised by a CI, more than three years ago.
Financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending; supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.
	✓	Peer reviewer has intellectual property that is being commercialised by an affiliated institution. Peer reviewer has previously provided and/or received cells/animals to/from a CI on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a ‘High’ decision.
	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company, and the research proposal may impact upon the company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer may, or may be perceived to be, biased in their review of the application. For example, peer reviewer is a lobbyist on a particular issue.

Appendix C – NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Assessment Criteria

Applications for NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Grant Opportunity are assessed by peers against the assessment criteria listed below and the category descriptors at [Appendix B](#).

- Health Significance (20%)
- Scientific Merit (20%)
- Design and methods (25%)
- Expertise of the research team (15%)
- Quality of the research partnership (20%)

Applications are assessed relative to opportunity, taking into consideration any career disruptions, where applicable (see [Appendix C](#)).

It is recognised that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions will be considered when assessing research output and track record.

Appendix D - NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 Category Descriptors

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
7 Outstanding	The proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convincingly demonstrates that the research addresses a very significant health issue in the East Asia region. • Has the potential to significantly advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a significant health issue of great importance to health in the East Asia region. • Thoroughly articulates how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. • Comprehensively articulates how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. • Is expected to contribute substantively to major improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for the proposed research is outstanding. • The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are outstanding. • Any objectives are well-defined, highly coherent and have a strongly developed scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call • The proposed research may represent a highly original and innovative approach to addressing the health question. • Original findings are highly likely to result. • Findings are highly likely to translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful project completion is highly feasible given that all of the required expertise and research tools and techniques are present in the relevant research environment(s). • The proposed study design is outstanding and will achieve objectives within stated timeframe and budget. • The methods and proposed analyses are very comprehensive and clearly appropriate. • Design and methods are highly effective in facilitating shared work based on common interests and agendas that can only be achieved through multilateral cooperation and engagement. • The applicants demonstrate comprehensive awareness of the relevant technical issues. • The statistical power (where appropriate) is sufficiently significant to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are well developed. No suggested improvements are identified. • Timeframes for demonstrating results are comprehensively defined. • Proposal comprehensively addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. • Where appropriate, research comprehensively addresses gender issues and exhibits gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	The Australian-based research team collectively possess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding academic qualifications • Outstanding topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. • Outstanding publication track-record in major peer reviewed scientific journals as well as other professional publications, and/or substantial experience in disseminating research results. • Senior members with outstanding national and international reputations in the field of research relevant to the application • Early career researchers whom are very strong contributors to the overall team quality & capability 	The collaborative partnership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will provide an outstanding, unique research contribution that has the potential to significantly advance the field further. • Has comprehensively demonstrated that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership • Will be highly effective in promoting comprehensive working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. • Will significantly increase the transfer of new knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. • Has a highly diverse team, where gender and experience within the team is considered. • Has outstanding opportunities for capability building of researchers, with a clear and comprehensive plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project • Will result in outstanding outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
6 Excellent	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly demonstrates that the research addresses a very significant health issue in the East Asia region. • Has the potential to advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a significant health issue of great importance to health in the East Asia region. • Soundly articulates how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. • Effectively articulates how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. • Is expected to contribute substantively to remarkable improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for the proposed research is excellent. • The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are excellent. • Any objectives are defined, coherent and have a strongly developed scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call • The proposed research may represent a very original and innovative approach to addressing the health question. • Original findings are very likely to result. • Findings are likely to translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful project completion is very feasible given that all of the required expertise and research tools and techniques are present in the relevant research environment(s) • The proposed study design is excellent and will likely achieve objectives within stated timeframe and budget. • The methods and proposed analyses are comprehensive and appropriate. • Design and methods are very effective in facilitating shared work based on common interests and agendas that can only be achieved through multilateral cooperation and engagement. • The applicants demonstrate good awareness of the relevant technical issues. • The statistical power (where appropriate) is appropriate to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are well developed. It is difficult to suggest areas for improvement. • Timeframes for demonstrating results are clearly articulated. • Proposal effectively addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. • Where appropriate, research effectively addresses gender issues and exhibits gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively possess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent academic qualifications • Excellent topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. • Excellent publication track-record in major peer reviewed scientific journals as well as other professional publications, and/or excellent experience in disseminating research results. • Senior members with excellent national and/or international reputations in the field of research relevant to the application. • Early career researchers whom are strong contributors to the overall team quality & capability 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will provide an excellent research contribution that has the potential to advance the field further. • Has significantly demonstrated that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership • Will be very effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. • Will increase the transfer of new knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. • Has a diverse team, where gender and experience within the team is considered. • Has excellent opportunities for capability building of researchers, with a clear and strong plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project • Will result in significant outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
5 Very Good	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly demonstrates that the research addresses a significant health issue in the East Asia region. Has the potential to advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a significant health issue of great importance to health in the East Asia region. Clearly articulates how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. Clearly articulates how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. Is expected to contribute substantively to significant improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rationale for the proposed research is very good. The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are very good. Has very clear objectives and scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call The proposed research may represent an original and innovative approach to addressing the health question. Original findings are likely to result. Findings may translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful project completion is feasible given that all of the required expertise and research tools and techniques are present in the relevant research environment(s) The proposed study design is very good, with some minor concerns, and will likely achieve objectives within stated timeframe and budget. The methods and proposed analyses are very suitable. Design and methods are effective in facilitating shared work based on common interests and agendas that can only be achieved through multilateral cooperation and engagement. The applicants demonstrate appropriate awareness of the relevant technical issues. The statistical power (where appropriate) is suitable to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are suitable. General areas for improvement may be identified. Timeframes for demonstrating results are soundly articulated. Proposal appropriately addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. Where appropriate, research adequately addresses gender issues and exhibits gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively possess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very good academic qualifications Very good topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. Very good publication track-record in major peer reviewed scientific journals as well as other professional publications, and/or good experience in disseminating research results. Members that possess very good and growing national and/or international reputations in the field of research relevant to the application Early career researchers whom are valuable contributors to the overall team quality & capability 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide a good research contribution that has the potential to advance the field further. Has demonstrated that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership Will be effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. Will support the transfer of new knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. Has a diverse team, where gender and experience within the team are well considered. Has very good opportunities for capability building of researchers, with a clear and sound plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project Will result in good outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
4 Good	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfactorily demonstrates that the research addresses a significant health issue in the East Asia region. • Has the potential to advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a significant health issue of great importance to health in the East Asia region. • Satisfactorily articulates how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. • Satisfactorily articulates how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. • Is expected to contribute to improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for the proposed research is well made. • The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are acceptable. • Has clear objectives and scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call • Original findings may result. • Findings may translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful project completion is generally feasible although some concerns exist about ongoing need to develop or obtain some research tools and techniques • The study design is adequate, and the likelihood of achieving objectives within stated timeframe and budget raises some concerns. • There is insufficient detail for parts of the method and proposed analyses methods and proposed analyses, or the study would benefit significantly by improvements in one or more of these areas. • Design and methods facilitate shared work based on common interests and agendas that can only be achieved through multilateral cooperation and engagement. The applicants demonstrate general awareness of the relevant technical issues. • Timeframes for demonstrating results are satisfactorily articulated. • The statistical power (where appropriate) is suitable to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are acceptable. Very minor areas for improvement are identified. • Proposal satisfactorily addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. • Where appropriate, research satisfactorily addresses gender issues and exhibits gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively possess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate academic qualifications, topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. • Appropriate topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. • A Good track record of publishing peer reviewed scientific journals and other professional publications, and/or experience in disseminating research results. • Members that have good and growing national and/or international reputations in the field of research relevant to the application. • Early career researchers who contribute to the overall team quality & capability. 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide general opportunities for contributing to existing research that have the potential to advance the field further. • Has somewhat demonstrated that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership • Will promote acceptable working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. • Can support the transfer of knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. • Has a diverse team, where gender and experience within the team are appropriately considered. • Has good opportunities for capability building of researchers, with a satisfactory plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project • Will result in acceptable outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact • There are some areas where the quality of the partnership has not been fully demonstrated or could be strengthened.

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
3 Marginal	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates to a limited degree, that the research addresses an important health issue in the East Asia region. • Has some potential to advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a health issue in the East Asia region. • Does not satisfactorily articulate how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. • Does not satisfactorily articulate how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. • Could be expected to contribute to improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for the proposed research is clear to a limited degree. • The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are standard. • Has somewhat unclear objectives and scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call • Original findings may result. • Findings may (but are unlikely to), translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises several concerns about feasibility and thus the likelihood of successful completion. • The study design is acceptable, and the likelihood of achieving objectives within stated timeframe and budget raises several concerns. • There is insufficient detail for parts of the method and proposed analyses methods and proposed analyses, or the study would benefit significantly by improvements in one or more of these areas. • Design and method promotes limited mutually beneficial engagement and shared work based on common interests and agendas. Several concerns that this could be achieved outside multilateral cooperation. • The applicants demonstrate limited awareness of the relevant technical issues. • Timeframes for demonstrating results are poorly articulated. • The statistical power (where appropriate) is marginal in its ability to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are borderline. Major areas for improvement are identified. • Proposal poorly addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. • Where appropriate, research poorly addresses gender issues and is unlikely to exhibit gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have the academic qualifications, partial topic based knowledge, and experience to undertake the proposed research. • May possess the appropriate topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. • Have a very basic track-record of publishing peer reviewed scientific journals and other professional publications, and/or experience in disseminating research results. • Include members with established national reputations but who do not yet have strong international profiles. • Include early career researchers whom provide limited contributions to the overall team quality & capability. 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May provide opportunities for contributing to existing research that have the potential to advance the field further. • Has limited demonstration that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership • May promote basic working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. • May support the transfer of knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. • Has limited gender and experience diversity within the team, which could impact outcomes. • May have general opportunities for capability building of researchers, with unsatisfactorily defined plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project • Will result in limited outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact • There are several areas where the quality of the partnership is not demonstrated or could be strengthened.

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
2 Unsatisfactory	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently demonstrates that the research addresses a main health issue in the East Asia region. • Has unclear potential to advance knowledge/ scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a health issue in the East Asia region. • Poorly articulates how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. • Poorly articulates how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices, including clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. • May not contribute to improvements in health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for the proposed research is not very clear. • The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are not clear. • Has unclear objectives and scientific approach relevant to the scope of the research call • Original findings are unlikely result. • Findings are extremely unlikely to translate into fundamental novel approaches in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises several major concerns about feasibility and the likelihood of successful completion. • The study design is inadequate, and the likelihood of achieving objectives within stated timeframe and budget raises several major concerns. • The design is questionable or there is very little detail on the methodology and proposed analyses. • Design and method unlikely to promote mutually beneficial engagement, with shared work based on common interests and agendas. Several major concerns that this could be easily achieved outside multilateral cooperation. • The applicants demonstrate unsatisfactory awareness of the relevant technical issues. • Timeframes for demonstrating results are poorly articulated. • The statistical power (where appropriate) is unsatisfactory in its ability to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are poor. Significant areas for improvement are identified. • Proposal does not satisfactorily addresses risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability - where appropriate. • Where appropriate, research does not satisfactorily addresses gender issues and are unlikely to exhibit gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have insufficient or inappropriate academic qualifications or research backgrounds to undertake the proposed research • Have a weak track-record of publication output and/or there are serious doubts in their ability to disseminate research results. • Include members that are not well known nationally or internationally in the relevant research fields. • Include early career researchers who provide limited contributions to the overall team quality & capability. 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is unlikely to provide opportunities for contributing to existing research. • Has very limited demonstration that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership • Is unlikely to promote working collaborations and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. • Is unlikely to support the transfer of knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. • Unacceptable gender and experience diversity within the team, which could significantly impact outcomes. • Is unlikely to have opportunities for capability building of researchers, with poorly defined plans and methodology to build health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project • Will result in very limited outcomes both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact • There are many areas where the quality of the partnership is not demonstrated or could be strengthened.

Category	Health significance (20%)	Scientific merit (20%)	Design and methods (25%)	Expertise of the research team (15%)	Quality of the research partnership (20%)
I Poor	<p>The proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not demonstrate that the research addresses a significant health issue in the East Asia region. Does not have the potential to significantly advance knowledge/scientific discovery, develop science and technology in the region or resolve a significant health issue of great importance to health in the East Asia region. Does not articulate how the research will contribute to the evidence base for health in the region. Does not demonstrate how the research is likely to impact and influence any relevant health policies and practices. There is no clarity on who will benefit from the research, how they will benefit and what will be done to ensure that they can benefit. Even if the research aims are met, there is little chance that the proposed research would contribute to improved health or important health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rationale for the proposed research is poor or absent. The aims and (where appropriate) hypotheses are poor or absent. Objectives and the scientific approach are unclear on relevance to the scope of the research call Original findings are extremely unlikely to result. Findings will not translate into fundamental outcomes in health that translate into policy and practice for partner countries and Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research plan does not seem feasible and is unlikely to be successfully completed The proposed study design is unacceptable as proposed and the likelihood of achieving objectives within stated timeframe and budget is unlikely. There is little or no detail of the methodology and the proposed analyses. Would not promote mutually beneficial engagement by developing equitable, effective research partnerships, with shared work based on common interests and agendas. Does not require multilateral partnership for the proposal. The applicants demonstrate no awareness of the relevant technical issues. Timeframes for demonstrating results are not articulated. The statistical power (where appropriate) is unable to ensure a definitive outcome and the statistical analyses are unacceptable. Proposal does not address risks and their management, including any issues of sustainability, where appropriate. Research does not address gender issues and would not exhibit gender and socially inclusive research processes. 	<p>The Australian-based research team collectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have poor academic qualifications Have poor topic based knowledge and experience to undertake the proposed research. Have a poor publication track-record in major peer reviewed scientific journals as well as other professional publications, and there are serious doubts as to whether the research will be completed and disseminated appropriately. Include members which are not well known nationally or internationally in the relevant research fields. Include early career researchers who provide no contributions to the overall team quality & capability. 	<p>The collaborative partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is inadequate and/or unacceptable. Does not demonstrate that the team will utilise expertise between members of the research partnership Will not promote working collaboration and intellectual exchange between Australia and research institutions in the East Asia region. Will not support the transfer of knowledge and/or technologies and build Australian research capacity and build Australian research capacity to address global health research priorities. Has limited detail on the diversity of the team, which could significantly impact outcomes. Has limited detail and/or serious doubts on opportunities for capability building of researchers, with a unclear plan and methodology on building health research capacity (including capability, mentoring and career development) for early career researchers involved in the project both in terms of knowledge transfer and impact. Significant areas where the quality of the partnership is not demonstrated or could be strengthened.

Appendix E - Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Qualifying applications must address the NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria as follows:

- Community engagement - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.
- Benefit - the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.
- Sustainability and transferability - the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.
- Building capability - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Peer reviewers will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, when scoring the *Assessment Criteria* set out in Appendix C.

Appendix F – Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

Peer reviewers should consider the following when assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians. The points below should be explicit throughout the application and not just addressed separately within the Indigenous criteria section.

Community Engagement

- Does the proposal clearly demonstrate a thorough and culturally appropriate level of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or health services prior to submission of the application?
- Is there clear evidence that the level of engagement throughout the project will ensure the feasibility of the proposed study?
- Has the application demonstrated evidence that any of the methods, objectives or key elements of the proposed work have been formed, influenced or defined by the community?
- Were the Indigenous community instrumental in identifying and inviting further research into the health issue and will the research outcomes directly benefit the ‘named’ communities?
- Is there a history of working together with the ‘named’ communities e.g. co-development of the grant, involvement in pilot studies or how the ‘named’ communities will have input/control over the research process and outcomes across the life of the project?

Benefit

- Does the proposal clearly outline the potential health benefits (both intermediate and long term, direct and indirect) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the benefit(s) of the project have been determined or guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities or organisations themselves?

Sustainability and Transferability

- Does the proposal:
 - Provide a convincing argument that the outcomes will have a positive impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which can be maintained after the study has been completed?
 - Have relevance to other Indigenous communities?
 - Clearly plan for and articulate a clear approach to knowledge translation and exchange?
 - Demonstrate that the findings are likely to be taken up in health services and/or policy?
- Will the outcomes from the study make a lasting contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their wellbeing?

Building Capability

- Does the proposal outline how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or communities will benefit from capability development?
- Does the proposal outline how researchers and individuals/groups associated with the research project will develop capabilities that allow them to have a greater understanding/engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Appendix G – NHMRC Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy with respect to peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants.

NHMRC's objective is to support the best Australian health and medical research and the best researchers, at all career stages. NHMRC seeks to ensure that researchers with a variety of career experiences and those who have experienced pregnancy or a major illness/injury or have caring responsibilities, are not disadvantaged in applying for NHMRC grants.

Policy approach

NHMRC considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant's track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including considering whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. It also means that applicants with career disruptions should not be disadvantaged (in terms of years since they received their PhD) when determining their eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants and that their Career Disruptions should be considered when their applications are being peer reviewed.

In alignment with *NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review*, particularly the principles of fairness and transparency, the following additional principles further support this objective:

- **Research opportunity:** Researchers' outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and the research they conduct.
- **Fair access:** Researchers should have access to funding support available through NHMRC grant programs consistent with their experience and career stage.
- **Career diversity:** Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside of academia should not be disadvantaged. NHMRC recognises that time spent in sectors such as industry, may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

The above principles frame NHMRC's approach to the assessment of a researcher's track record during expert review of grant applications and eligibility of applicants applying for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. NHMRC expects that those who provide expert assessment during peer review will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers to be funded. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be very varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption considerations during peer review.

Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review of applications for funding

During peer review of applications, circumstances considered under the Relative to Opportunity Policy are:

- amount of time spent as an active researcher
- available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities

- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods that can impact on track record and productivity
- clinical, administrative or teaching workload
- relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact on research productivity
- for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including ‘sorry business’
- the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question
- research outputs and productivity noting time employed in other sectors. For example there might be a reduction in publications when employed in sectors such as industry
- carer responsibilities (that do not come under the Career Disruption policy below).

Career Disruption considerations during peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants

A Career Disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant’s capacity to work, due to:

- pregnancy
- major illness/injury
- carer responsibilities.

The period of career disruption may be used:

- to determine an applicant’s eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant
- to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
- for consideration by peer reviewers

To be considered for the purposes of eligibility and peer review, a period of Career Disruption is defined as:

- a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
- continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.⁴

Career Disruption and eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants

A Career Disruption can affect an applicant’s eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant. For such grants, the 10-year time limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.

⁴ For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a Career Disruption of 90 calendar days.

Appendix H – Guidance for Single Summary Statements

NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 advice on preparing single summary statements against criteria

In response to feedback received from the sector regarding applicant feedback, the NHMRC e-ASIA Joint Research Program Grant Scheme 2020 has included the provision of qualitative feedback to applicants. This will serve to increase the transparency of peer review. In the absence of Grant Review Panels, peer reviewers have been allocated four weeks to complete their assessments.

Peer reviewers will be required to write a single summary statement reflecting each criterion of their assessment for each application assigned to them. Your single summary statement should be brief (between two to three sentences) and it should highlight the key elements of the application that influenced your scores. Ask yourself “what did this application need for me to score it higher” or, “what was it about this application that made me score it as well as I did” (for stronger applications).

These summary statements will be provided to the applicants when outcomes are released and will offer a valuable learning opportunity for applicants seeking NHMRC funding in future rounds.

Your feedback should focus only on what has been provided in the application, avoiding extraneous comments or considerations you might have about the research/er(s). You should be mindful at all times to frame your feedback against the assessment criteria and category descriptors.

Single summary statements should avoid:

- making reference to the score you individually allocated;
- making specific comparisons between applications/applicants;
- discourteous, derogatory or unprofessional language;
- referring to your suitability to review the application; or
- referring to issues that are out of the applicant’s/reviewer’s control (e.g. “This application deserves to be funded”).

Your feedback should reflect the scores you have given the applicant(s) (don’t provide exclusively positive written feedback for an application you gave low scores to, or vice versa).

A good rule when providing written feedback is to imagine what feedback would be most helpful for you, if you were the applicant(s).

Provided below are some phrases that provide examples of feedback you might provide to applicants in your single summary statements. These phrases demonstrate appropriate language and tone for applicant feedback.

These phrases are examples only, based on what peer reviewers identified as common characteristics of stronger/weaker applications. Your feedback to applicants should reflect your own review of, and be specific to, the application in question. The feedback should be consistent with the scores you have given the application and therefore may have elements of both stronger and weaker applications.

Example phrases for strong(er) applications

- The application was well written, clear in its aims/ambitions and addressed the Category Descriptors concisely and directly.
- The research was clearly described, including its impact and relevance to the scheme. The research has potential far-reaching benefits, corroborated with strong evidence.
- The research program/proposal was well written, well evidenced and ambitious. It was coherent in its approach, with clear statements on what the research might achieve, and how the research would be a significant progression on current activities.

Example phrases for weak(er) applications

- The application was difficult to follow at times as it was poorly constructed/written.
- Although ambitious in its aims, the research proposal would have benefited from a more cohesive program of work, rather than what appeared to be disparate elements.
- This application would have benefited from a more concise, coherent description of its aims.
- There was heavy use of jargon throughout the application which made it difficult to follow at times. The proposed research was poorly defined, and it was difficult to see how it was a significant progression on work already undertaken.
- Overall I thought this was a promising proposal that would benefit from additional detail and clarity around the research aims and design.
- This application would have benefited from the inclusion of verifiable evidence.