Peer review for NHMRC’s new grant program

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Chief Executive Officer
Objectives of the new grant program

- Encourage innovation and creativity across all fields of health and medical research
- Provide opportunities for talented researchers at all career stages and across all disciplines
- Minimise burden on researchers, freeing up time for research

... while retaining core focus on improving human health and wellbeing through research
NHMRC’s new grant program

INVESTIGATOR GRANTS
To support the research program of outstanding investigators at all career stages

SYNERGY GRANTS
To support outstanding multidisciplinary teams of investigators to work together to answer major questions that cannot be answered by a single investigator

IDEAS GRANTS
To support focussed innovative research projects addressing a specific question

STRATEGIC AND LEVERAGING GRANTS
To support research that addresses identified national needs – *Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies*
Peer review consultation

• Peer review processes were explicitly excluded from the Structural Review of NHMRC’s Grant Program in 2016-2017.

• NHMRC consulted on peer review processes for new grant program in 2017-2018. Feedback included:
  o need for appropriate expertise among peer reviewers
  o focus on impact and outcomes in track record assessment
  o support for streamlined processes
  o request for more feedback to applicants and reviewers

Goals in designing peer review for the new grant program

• Streamline peer review to reduce the burden on the research sector
  o reduce the number of touch points per application

• Improve the confidence of the sector in peer review
  o increase appropriate expertise per application

• Achieve more than one round per year
  o particularly for Ideas Grants

• Stagger application open/close dates across schemes
Considerations for the first year

• Uncertainties:
  o application numbers
  o impact on review and reviewer time

• Major change for the research sector:
  o new grant program
  o new grants management system (RGMS replacement)
  o new format for funding rules (Australian Government’s GrantConnect)

➢ Staged implementation of new peer review processes
To support the research program of outstanding investigators at all career stages

- **Criteria: Track Record (70%) and Knowledge Gain (30%)**
  - new Track Record assessment framework: publications, impact, leadership
  - Knowledge Gain: research significance and quality

- Streamline process to reduce peer review burden on research sector
  - panel only, no interviews, discussion by exception
  - shorter process allows separation of open/close dates from Ideas Grants

- Improve confidence in the process
  - five assessors per application
Framework for track record assessment

- Shift focus away from inputs (e.g. grants received) towards outcomes
- Future trial of bibliometric indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Publications</th>
<th>3. Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 year list (taking Career Disruption into account)</td>
<td>Research programs and team leadership</td>
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<td>Five best publications</td>
<td>Institutional leadership</td>
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<td>Research policy and professional leadership</td>
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<td>Research mentoring</td>
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<th>2. Research Impact</th>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
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<td>Social</td>
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Framework for track record assessment in 2019

1. Publications (35%)
   - 10 year list (taking Career Disruption into account)
   - Five best publications

2. Research Impact (20%)
   - Knowledge
   - Health
   - Economic
   - Social

3. Leadership (15%)
   - Research programs and team leadership
   - Institutional leadership
   - Research policy and professional leadership
   - Research mentoring

- Shift focus away from inputs (e.g. grants received) towards outcomes
- Future trial of bibliometric indicators
## 2. Research Impact indicators

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<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence of scientific reach and influence</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Healthcare cost savings</td>
<td>End-user/public engagement</td>
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<td>Participation in clinical research</td>
<td>IP development</td>
<td>Community health benefit</td>
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<td>Policy leadership</td>
<td>Industry collaboration</td>
<td>Wellbeing of end-user and community</td>
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<td>Clinical guidelines</td>
<td>Start-up company</td>
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<td>Standards</td>
<td>Product to market</td>
<td>Reducing inequalities</td>
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<td>Development of product/intervention</td>
<td>Employment</td>
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INVESTIGATOR GRANTS

To support the research program of outstanding investigators at all career stages

- **Criteria: Track Record (70%) and Knowledge Gain (30%)**
  - new Track Record assessment framework: publications, impact, leadership
  - Knowledge Gain: research significance and quality

- **Streamline process to reduce peer review burden on research sector**
  - panel only, no interviews, discussion by exception
  - shorter process allows separation of open/close dates from Ideas Grants

- **Improve confidence in the review process**
  - five assessors per application
Peer Review for Investigator Grants (2019)

1. **Submit application**
2. **5-member panels assess application (all criteria)**
3. **Discussion by exception (teleconference or videoconference)**
4. **Ranked list based on overall score (Emerging Leadership & Leadership)**
To support outstanding multidisciplinary teams of investigators to work together to answer major questions that cannot be answered by a single investigator

- Criteria: Track Record (40%), Synergy (30%), Knowledge Gain (30%)
Synergy assessment

Intended to encourage:

- multidisciplinary research to address a major problem
- diverse research teams, e.g. by gender, career stage, culture
- engagement:
  - people with specialised knowledge (as CI, AI, consultant etc)
  - direct beneficiaries of research
To support outstanding multidisciplinary teams of investigators to work together to answer major questions that cannot be answered by a single investigator

- **Criteria:** Track Record (40%), Synergy (30%), Knowledge Gain (30%)

- **Streamline process to reduce peer review burden on research sector**
  - panel only, no interviews, discussion by exception

- **Improve confidence in the review process**
  - at least five assessors per application
  - broad expertise to assess Synergy and Knowledge Gain
  - discipline expertise to assess Track Record of each Chief Investigator
Peer Review for Synergy Grants (2019)

1. **Submit application**
2. **Assessment by panel members** (Knowledge Gain and Synergy)
3. **Shortlist applications**
4. **Discussion by exception** (teleconference or videoconference)
5. **5 Assessors/Chief Investigator for Track Record** (Track Record Framework)
6. **Discussion by exception – individual Chief Investigator Track Records only** (teleconference or videoconference)
7. **Ranked list based on overall score** (All criteria)

**STAGE 1**

**STAGE 2**
Peer Review for Synergy Grants (2019) – Stage 1

1. Submit application
2. Assessment by panel members (Knowledge Gain and Synergy)
3. Shortlist applications
4. Discussion by exception (teleconference or videoconference)
Peer Review for Synergy Grants (2019) – Stage 2

5 Assessors/Chief Investigator for Track Record (Track Record Framework)

Discussion by exception – individual Chief Investigator Track Records only (teleconference or videoconference)

Ranked list based on overall score (all criteria)
To support focussed innovative research projects addressing a specific question

- Criteria: Research Quality (35%), Innovation and Creativity (25%), Significance (20%), Feasibility (20%)
Innovation and Creativity assessment

• A specific criterion for the Ideas Grant scheme

• Intended to encourage fresh thinking

• Encompasses:
  o concepts, approaches, methodologies, interventions in all Broad Research Areas
  o incremental advances
  o not only commercial innovation
  o showing what doesn’t work
To support focussed innovative research projects addressing a specific question

• Criteria: Research Quality (35%), Innovation and Creativity (25%) Significance (20%), Feasibility (20%)

• Streamline process to reduce peer review burden on research sector
  o panel only, no external assessments or rebuttals, discussion by exception
  o shorter process allows separation of open/close dates from Investigator Grants

• Improve confidence in the process
  o four assessors per application
Peer Review for Ideas Grants (2019)

1. Submit application
2. Discipline Panels: Four Spokespersons score each application (all criteria)
3. NFFC and Rescue
   Panel Meeting: All members score applications (all criteria)
4. Ranked List based on overall score
To support research that addresses identified national needs

Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies scheme

- Not capped relative to other three schemes
- Criteria: Significance (40%), Research Quality (40%), Team Quality and Capability (20%)
- Category descriptors designed for clinical trials and cohort studies
- Peer review process based on recent MRFF clinical trials schemes
Peer Review for Clinical Trials Grants (2019)

1. Submit application
2. Panel:
   Spokespersons score each application (all criteria)
3. Identify least competitive
4. Panel meeting:
   Confirm least competitive applications
   All members score remaining applications (all criteria)
5. Ranked List based on overall score
What’s next?

Work is continuing on:

• Category descriptors for peer review of new schemes
• Guidance on peer review criteria (e.g. impact case studies)
• Open/close dates and peer review timetable for 2019
• Relative to Opportunity/Career Disruption policy
• Development of new grants management system
NHMRC’s new grants management system

- Replacing RGMS in 2018 in time for new grant program
- Iterative development in consultation with external reference group
- Intuitive new user interface
- RGMS data to be transferred to new system
- Linkage to external data sources (e.g. ORCID)
Implementation of the new grant program

2018
- Targeted consultations on funding rules
- Drafting and Government approval of funding rules

2019
- Applications open
- Peer review of applications
- Publish funding rules

2020
- Grants commence
- First grants awarded
In summary

- Peer review processes for new grant program in 2019:
  - designed to support aims of each scheme
  - responsive to feedback from consultation
  - streamlined compared with current Project Grants process

- Further refinement anticipated in the future:
  - evolution of peer review processes
  - two rounds a year for Ideas Grants
  - improvement of feedback to applicants
  - peer review training
Discussion
Thank you