



# Transition Research Fund Investment Plan 2027





## **Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) Hīkina Whakatutuki – Lifting to make successful**

MBIE develops and delivers policy, services, advice and regulation to support economic growth and the prosperity and wellbeing of New Zealanders.

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# Introduction

The 2027 Transition Research Fund (the Fund) is a core component of the reformed Science, Innovation and Technology (SI&T) system. It responds to the direction set in the Science Investment Plan (SIP) and the investment principles and national priorities for the SI&T System.

The Fund represents a significant step towards a more coherent, strategy-led investment system, consolidating existing investigator-led funding into a single, unified mechanism. It will support high-quality research proposals aligned with areas of greatest impact, contributing to a more productive, resilient, and competitive economy, while continuing to invest in the fundamental and public-good science needed for New Zealand's economy, environment, and society to thrive.

This Investment Plan (the Plan) sets out:

- the purpose and scope of the Fund, including the objectives of each mechanism
- the Government's investment signals and priorities for the Fund
- how funding decisions will be made and how funding will be allocated.

The Research Funding New Zealand Board (the Board) will make funding decisions and allocated funds as set out in the [Gazette Notice](#) for the 2027 Fund. The funding decisions will consider the investment signals national priority targets set out in this Plan.

This Plan should be read together with the:

- Gazette Notice for the 2027 Fund (which sets out the eligibility criteria, assessment criteria and the amount of funding available)
- the SIP (which sets out system level priorities for science investment)
- 2027 Call for Proposals (which includes funding application and submission guidelines for the three funding mechanisms under the fund – Talent Development, Projects and Programmes).

## Strategic context and rationale

The Fund operates within a reformed science system that is increasingly strategy-led and aligned to the national priorities, as articulated through the four pillars and the investment priorities set out in the SIP:

- Technology for Prosperity
- Primary Industries and Bioeconomy
- Environmental Sustainability and Resilience
- Healthy People and a Thriving Society

The SIP provides national direction by identifying priorities for New Zealand within the pillar framework, including both in-scope and out-of-scope areas for public investment. These are represented through five to six priority 'opportunities' for each of the four pillars. All funding and research across the system must demonstrate how they can deliver impact aligned with these priority 'opportunities'.

The SIP also sets national investment principles to be applied across all funding, that ensures that funding delivers maximum long-term value for New Zealand. This includes placing greater emphasis on impact, commercialisation, and economic contribution to transition New Zealand towards a more strategy led outcomes driven science system.

Within this context, the Fund plays a critical role in maintaining a strong pipeline of investigator-led research, while strengthening alignment with system priorities and delivering tangible benefits for New Zealand, including improved economic performance, environmental outcomes, and societal wellbeing.

# Fund purpose and scope

The Fund supports investigator-led research across the full research spectrum, from discovery through to applied research, across all disciplines aligned to national priorities.

It is designed as a progressive system, where different types of research are supported through mechanisms with distinct purposes, scales, and expectations, moving from capability development through to delivery of impact. Together the three mechanisms under the Fund, Talent Development, Projects and Programmes aim to work together to meet the key objectives of the Fund:

## 1. Strengthen alignment with national pillar priorities

- a. Direct research effort toward areas that contribute to national pillar priorities and long-term societal, environmental, and economic outcomes for New Zealand.
- b. Support research that demonstrates clear potential for genuine, real-world impact, delivering tangible benefits for New Zealand.

## 2. Sustain national research capability

- a. Maintain continuity of excellent, investigator-led foundational and applied research during a period of system transition.
- b. Grow critical skills, expertise, and institutional capability across the research system.

## 3. Enable excellence and innovation across all disciplines

- a. Support high-quality fit-for-purpose research based on excellence, originality and rigour, regardless of discipline or sector.
- b. Encourage bold, high-risk, high-reward ideas with potential for significant impact.

## 4. Develop future research leadership and workforce capability

- a. Build a strong, diverse, and sustainable research workforce, with particular emphasis on career progression and leadership development.
- b. Support researchers to align with and transition into areas of highest national priority, strengthening the overall responsiveness and impact of the research system.

## 5. Support system coherence and collaboration

- a. Promote collaboration across institutions, disciplines and sectors.
- b. Improve connectivity between researchers, end-users, communities and policy makers.

## Talent Development

Talent Development investments aim to:

- Develop emerging and future leaders aligned to national priorities who can conceive, lead and scale the next generation of research.
- Develop specialist capability in new areas, particularly in areas aligned to national priorities.
- Support early career researchers and other potential future research leaders looking to pivot into a new research area that is identified as a priority for New Zealand.

As clearly signalled in the SIP, a clear focus is shifting resources to the Technology for Prosperity Pillar. To build the requisite capability to support the growth of science in this pillar - for the 2027 round – the sole focus of the Talent Development mechanism will be on emerging and future talent in the Technology for Prosperity Pillar. Any researcher developing technology that could benefit primary, environment or health can apply into the Technology for Prosperity Pillar.

While the focus of this mechanism is on developing early career researchers, they can also lead or contribute to proposals for any mechanism.

## Projects

The Projects investments aim to:

- Support small projects and teams that test bold and innovative research ideas, methodologies and capabilities that are likely to deliver meaningful benefits for New Zealand aligned with national pillar priorities.
- Develop and grow specialist capability in areas aligned to national priorities.

## Programmes

The Programmes mechanism aims to:

- Support larger, ambitious, more complex, multi-year programmes that build collaborations and inter-disciplinary teams that drives impact for New Zealand.
- Support programmes that address complex challenges or opportunities that have a high potential to positively transform New Zealand’s future aligned with national priorities.
- Embed and grow specialist expertise aligned to national priorities.

# The funding available

The Gazette Notice sets out the value and duration of funding available under each of the four pillars. The Gazette Notice sets out the Minister's expectations on how the Board makes decisions. This includes the expectation that the Board aims to meet the investment targets for each of the four pillars.

## Vision Mātauranga

The Vision Mātauranga Policy (Vision Mātauranga) aims to create a better future for all New Zealanders through the innovative potential of Māori knowledge, resources and people. Vision Mātauranga applies across, and is integrated within, all MBIE science investment mechanisms.

Where applicable, proposals must consider the relevancy of the Vision Mātauranga Policy. We expect that the Vision Mātauranga Policy will not be relevant to all proposals. Proposals that give effect to the Policy should demonstrate the relevance and use of a fit-for-purpose approach.

## Investment signals for the fund

The Fund operates within the pillar-based system, aligning investment to national priorities while maintaining flexibility for investigator-led ideas. The Fund will support a broad range of disciplines and research types, recognising that pathways to impact vary across domains.

To be considered for funding, proposals must demonstrate clear alignment with one of the four pillars, and the underlying priorities ('opportunities') in each pillar, as detailed in the SIP and they must demonstrate credible pathways to delivering impact against these priorities ('opportunities') with clear relevance to New Zealand.

Proposals can demonstrate this impact for either industry or public good outcomes, depending on the nature of the research.

The Board will prioritise funding for impactful and excellent proposals which:

- Includes meaningful engagement with industry, communities and end-users.
- Strengthens international connectedness, including high-value partnerships, talent and investment or access to shared assets.
- Builds workforce capability and future research leadership, with particular focus on expanding research capacity in the Technology for Prosperity Pillar.
- Enables innovation in downstream applications.
- Encourages interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration.

The 2027 Fund will focus on developing new capability and promising research ideas in the Technology for Prosperity Pillar. Research in advanced technology must align to the Technology for Prosperity Pillar priorities and focus on economic growth through the technology sector. However, the market for such technologies could include the primary sector/bioeconomy, environment and health sectors. Researchers working directly on developing technology with wider applications to other sectors can apply into the Technology for Prosperity Pillar, but research focussed simply on applying technologies to other pillars, fall outside the Technology for Prosperity Pillar.

## Portfolio targets for the Transition Research Fund

Portfolio targets are in place to help the Fund achieve its objectives and set the long-term direction and contribute to the 2029/30 Pillar investment targets published in the SIP. As the system is at the start of a reform process, the portfolio targets play a critical role in driving the shift described in the SIP.

Funding decisions will be guided by indicative targets for number of contracts and investment within each mechanism, and maximum total funding available within each pillar.

The Talent Development mechanism for the Transition Research Fund is fully aligned to the Technology for Prosperity pillar, with indicative investment of up to \$12.3 million funding 40-50 contracts. For the remaining mechanisms, the indicative targets (with Talent Development included in the totals) are:

Mechanism	Target	Primary Industries and Bioeconomy	Technology for Prosperity	Environmental Sustainability and Resilience	Healthy People and a Thriving Society
Projects	Investment	\$8.7m	\$20.0m	\$7.6m	\$4.6m
	Number	15-18	38-42	13-17	8-11
Programmes	Investment	\$10.6m	\$11.2m	\$8.2m	\$1.6m
	Number	5	5	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>Investment</b>	<b>\$19.3m</b>	<b>\$43.5m</b>	<b>\$15.8m</b>	<b>\$6.2m</b>

## Achieving portfolio targets

The portfolio targets are:

- Underpinned by a fixed maximum total investment available within each pillar.
- Flexible, so that the Board has ability to change the proportion invested in each mechanism, depending on the number and quality of proposals received.
- Expressed in terms of the annual, not total, contract value.