MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
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Transition Research Fund 2027 Projects Webinar – Summary of Questions and Answers

We received a range of questions during the 21 October webinar. This document groups the questions received by theme and provides responses about the Projects mechanism, including questions that could not be addressed during the live session.

Funding amount, budget and eligible costs

Is the Projects funding amount fixed, or can a smaller amount be requested?

The total contract value is fixed at $1.5 million for each Projects contract. It is not a maximum from which applicants can request a smaller amount.

Must the $1.5 million be spent evenly over the three years?

No. The organisation may vary its internal spending profile, provided it meets the contracted objectives, deliverables and timeline. However, MBIE will pay the organisation at a flat rate throughout the contract term, noting that the first payment will be greater.

Does the $1.5 million include overheads, and who sets the overhead rate?

Yes. The funding includes overheads, and the research organisation sets its overhead rate.

Can funding be allocated overseas?

Yes. International collaborators may be paid from the project where they add value and are fit for purpose. However, the majority of the research, science, technology or related activities must be undertaken in New Zealand unless Research Funding New Zealand (RFNZ) considers that there are compelling reasons to consider the proposal despite a greater proportion being undertaken overseas.

Can Projects funding support a PhD student, and when must the student be available?

Projects is not a scholarship mechanism, but project funding may support a PhD student, including partial support. The student must be available when their contribution is required. If the student is central to delivery throughout the project, the proposal should identify them and demonstrate that they will be available when needed. Applicants should not build a project around recruiting a student after contracting.

Research stage and early-career researchers

Will discovery-led research be disadvantaged compared with applied research?

No. Projects is open to discovery-led and applied research. Proposals will be considered against the published assessment criteria, including alignment with a relevant Pillar Investment Plan opportunity and the credibility of the proposed pathway to impact. The pathway should be appropriate to the nature and stage of the research. For discovery-led research, it may focus on knowledge generation and how applications or impacts may emerge over time.

Is there a defined early-career researcher category for Projects?

Projects does not have a separate early-career researcher category or a specific definition of an early-career researcher. The mechanism is open to researchers at any career stage. Applicants and research organisations should decide which proposals are strongest and best aligned to the fund.

Pillars, priorities and portfolio decisions

How are Pillar Investment Plans used in assessment and final decisions?

Alignment to a National Pillar Priority is assessed under an Impact criterion. RFNZ will also consider the overall mix of proposals across pillars, opportunities and outcomes when making portfolio decisions.

Is there a set budget for each opportunity within a pillar?

No target budget has been set for individual opportunities within a pillar. The Pillar Investment Plans provide non-quantitative indications, while final portfolio decisions will depend on the proposals received.

How should applicants select a primary pillar if their proposal aligns with more than one pillar?

Applicants must select the one pillar that aligns with the majority of their proposal and clearly explain how the proposal aligns with that pillar and its relevant priority opportunities. Applicants may also describe genuine alignment with additional pillars or opportunities where relevant but aligning with more than one pillar does not necessarily provide an advantage.

Were the funding figures shown for the pillars correct?

No. The figures presented during the webinar were incorrect. The published slides have been updated and show indicative annual funding of $20.0 million for Technology for Prosperity, $8.7 million for Primary Industries and Bioeconomy, $7.6 million for Environmental Sustainability and Resilience, and $4.6 million for Healthy People and a Thriving Society. Applicants should refer to the Gazette Notice and Projects Call for Proposals webpage for the current portfolio targets.

Will Pacific research receive a separate allocation?

No. There is no separate allocation for Pacific research. Pacific-focused proposals may be considered where they meet the Projects eligibility and assessment criteria, align with a relevant National Pillar Priority and its underlying priority opportunities, and demonstrate a credible pathway to meaningful benefits for New Zealand.

Research stage, impact and eligibility

Would university-led or science-push research be deprioritised where a priority refers to industry-led science?

Not necessarily. Applicants must clearly demonstrate how their proposal aligns with the relevant pillar opportunity and meets the published Projects assessment criteria. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how the proposal addresses an industry-led problem or opportunity

Can MBIE confirm in advance whether a specific organisation or research idea is eligible?

No. MBIE cannot determine eligibility before submission. RFNZ makes eligibility decisions using the complete submitted proposal and the Gazette Notice criteria.

How does RFNZ eligibility assessment work in practice?

RFNZ assesses proposals against the Gazetted eligibility criteria and decides which proposals progress to assessment. All eligibility decisions are made by RFNZ.

How will unintended consequences be tracked after research is funded?

Funded organisations will report annually on progress, outcomes and any emerging risks or unintended consequences. This will help identify issues early and allow them to be addressed as the project progresses.

Organisational caps

How were organisational caps set?

For Projects, MBIE considered historical contract awards under Endeavour Smart Ideas and the Marsden Fund main round, using average success information over the previous three years and applying an additional multiplier.

Will organisational caps change in future?

The Transition Research Fund is time limited and is planned to run once. Any future funding arrangements would include consideration of the approach to demand management, including organisational caps.

Will RFNZ collect information about ideas filtered out internally because of caps?

RFNZ will see submitted registrations and proposals, but not all ideas considered internally. RFNZ will not collect information about each organisation's internal selection process. MBIE will consider available information about the effect of the caps and discuss this with RFNZ. Findings will be communicated back to the sector

Do low caps for "any other organisation" prevent industry-led or Māori research organisations from applying?

No. Industry-led and Māori research organisations may apply under the "any other organisation" category and submit up to three proposals per mechanism. They do not need to partner with a listed research institute but must meet all eligibility requirements, including being, or representing, a New Zealand-based Research Organisation and having the capability and capacity to deliver the proposed research.

Application process, registration and timing

What information can change between registration and proposal?

The start and end dates, total funding requested, research keywords, Field of Research codes and Socio-Economic Objective codes cannot change between registration and proposal. The title, administrative details, pillar information, alignment explanation and Principal Investigator information may be updated at proposal stage.

Why is the total funding requested required at registration?

Every Projects application has a fixed total funding amount of $1.5 million. Applicants may complete the detailed budget between registration and proposal, but the total funding requested must remain $1.5 million.

When will applicants be notified and contracts begin?

Applicants are expected to be notified in late October or early November 2027. Contracts are expected to begin on 1 December 2027.

Why does contracting begin more than a year after the webinar?

The webinar was held early to allow sufficient time for each stage of the process, including proposal development and submission, eligibility checks and assessment. Funding decisions will be made on 28 October 2027, followed by contracting before projects begin on 1 December 2027.

Assessors and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Will the College of Assessors include international assessors?

Yes. The College of Assessors will include both international and domestic assessors.

How will nominated assessors be used?

Assessor nominations are provided at registration. Nominated assessors which pass MBIE's quality assurance requirements will be added to the College of Assessors. Assessors are selected from the College of Assessors on a per-proposal basis based on relevant expertise, experience and conflicts of interest. Being added to the College does not guarantee an assessment assignment.

When will the updated College membership be published?

MBIE expects to publish the updated College of Assessors membership on its website in November 2026.

Can assessors use AI?

Assessors cannot upload applicant information into AI tools or use AI to perform an assessment. Subject to their contract and confidentiality requirements, assessors may use AI tools to improve or proofread feedback they have written themselves.

Teams, roles and FTE requirements

Is there a limit on the size of a Projects team or the number of co-investigators?

There is no fixed formula for team size or specified numerical limit on co-investigators. The proposed team should be fit for purpose, with an appropriate mix of skills and clear roles and contributions. The appropriate size and composition will depend on the project.

Can a Projects proposal include multiple institutions or form part of a wider international collaboration?

Yes. Domestic and international collaboration may be included where it is appropriate, adds value and supports delivery of the proposed research. The application must demonstrate a credible pathway to impact in New Zealand and meet the eligibility requirement that the majority of the research, science, technology or related activities are undertaken in New Zealand, unless RFNZ considers there are compelling reasons otherwise.

Can a Principal Investigator be named on multiple Transition Research Fund applications?

Yes. A Principal Investigator may be named on multiple Projects and Programmes applications and may also be an Associate Investigator on other proposals. A Principal Investigator on a Talent Development proposal may also be a Principal Investigator on a Project or Programme. The restriction applies only to being Principal Investigator on more than one Talent Development proposal. Applicants should ensure that the person's combined time commitments are realistic across all proposals.

What are the minimum and maximum FTE requirements for Principal Investigators, co-PIs and key researchers?

The Principal Investigator must commit at least 0.15 FTE per year. The presentation does not specify a minimum FTE for co-PIs or key researchers, or a maximum FTE for the Principal Investigator. All FTE allocations should be appropriate and realistic for each person's contribution.

Must postdoctoral researchers, research assistants and technical assistants be available from day one?

No. These researchers need to be available when their contribution to the project is required. Where a postdoctoral researcher is critical to delivery across the project, they should be named in the appropriate role. However, the project plan must be able to be delivered according to the contracted timeline including resources which are required from day one.

Teams, doctoral researchers and international collaboration

How are domestic and international collaborations considered?

There is no general preference for domestic or international collaboration. Assessors will consider whether the proposed collaborators are appropriate, add value and support strong domestic and international positioning. The proposal must also meet the eligibility requirement that the majority of the research, science, technology or related activities are undertaken in New Zealand, unless RFNZ considers there are compelling reasons otherwise.

Stakeholders, partners and intellectual property

Is there a preference for industry partners?

No. Applicants should involve the stakeholders most appropriate to the pillar, project and proposed pathway to impact. Industry partners may be particularly relevant for some Technology for Prosperity proposals, while other, non-industry, stakeholders may be more appropriate for proposals aligned with other pillars. Many proposals will contain a mixture of both.

How will assessors judge whether stakeholder relationships are appropriate?

Assessors will apply their expertise when assessing whether the proposed stakeholder relationships are appropriate. Applicants should clearly explain the role and contribution of each stakeholder and provide relevant evidence to provided confidence to assessors that the stated relationships are in place.

Who owns new intellectual property created through a collaborative project?

Ownership of new intellectual property depends on the organisations involved and the agreed commercialisation approach. Collaborating organisations should document how intellectual property will be owned, managed and commercialised in accordance with the funding contract and MBIE's Intellectual Property Management Policy.

Vision Mātauranga

Can a project contribute to Vision Mātauranga without directly involving Māori researchers or communities?

When considering Vision Mātauranga, relevance is the starting point. Applicants should consider whether, and to what extent, Vision Mātauranga is relevant to their Programme, including whether the research connects meaningfully with Māori knowledge, people,

resources, interests or potential benefits. The nature and level of that relevance will differ between proposals. Where relevance is strong, applicants should consider how Vision Mātauranga is appropriately reflected in the Programme, including through its capability, participation, relationships, engagement and resourcing. This may involve Māori researchers, communities or other contributors where appropriate.

Applicants should not force a connection where one does not genuinely exist. What is important is that the approach to Vision Mātauranga is proportionate to its relevance to the proposed research.

Co-funding and stakeholder commitment

Is co-funding required, and when might it strengthen a Projects proposal?

No. Cash or in-kind co-funding is not an eligibility requirement. Where it is appropriate to the research stage, co-funding or other evidence of stakeholder commitment may strengthen the proposal's impact case. It may be less relevant for early-stage or discovery-led research, and applicants should not include co-funding simply for appearance. The strength of stakeholder relationships is more important than demonstrating any particular level of co-funding.

Pillars, priorities and interaction with other funding

What should applicants do if their proposed research may also align with a future NZIAT programme?

Applicants should not wait for another fund before applying. Submit the proposal to the fund that is open. If a later funding opportunity creates a genuine overlap, MBIE can discuss the position with the applicant, but the same research cannot be funded twice.