MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
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# Transition Research Fund 2027 Talent Development Webinar - Summary of Questions and Answers

We received a range of questions during the 15 October webinar. This document groups the questions received by theme and provides responses about the Talent Development mechanism, including questions that could not be addressed during the live session.

## Eligibility and employment

**What is considered an emerging or future research leader?**

There is no specific definition of an emerging or future research leader. The Talent Potential assessment criteria set out what Research Funding New Zealand (RFNZ) and assessors will consider when assessing an applicant's potential to become an emerging or future research leader. Applicants should clearly demonstrate in their proposal how they meet the published Talent Potential assessment criteria.

**Can an established researcher pivoting into a new research area be eligible?**

Yes. An established researcher who is pivoting or changing their research direction may be eligible, provided they meet the eligibility requirements. Their proposal should clearly demonstrate how they meet the published Talent Potential assessment criteria, including in the context of their new research direction.

**Does an early-career researcher need to be a New Zealand citizen?**

No. There is no specific citizenship eligibility requirement. However, the researcher must be employed by a New Zealand-based Research Organisation or by a New Zealand-based legal entity representing one.

**Must an applicant remain employed by a research organisation throughout the assessment period if their current employment contract ends before the funding decision?**

This will depend on the applicant's circumstances. MBIE funds organisations rather than individuals, and proposals must be submitted through an eligible research organisation. Applicants should discuss their employment status and eligibility to apply with the research office of their proposed host organisation.

**What happens if a Principal Investigator's employment circumstances change after an application is submitted or funding is awarded?**

MBIE funds organisations rather than individuals, and proposals must be submitted through an eligible research organisation. There is no automatic right to transfer an application or award to another Principal Investigator or research organisation. The proposal should demonstrate that the named Principal Investigator will be available to undertake the proposed research. If circumstances change after submission or funding is awarded, the research organisation should contact MBIE to discuss the change and whether the proposal or contract can continue. MBIE will consider the nature of the change and its effect on delivery of the proposed research. However, MBIE will not contract with an individual researcher, either directly or as a single person company.

## Proposal development

**What does strong capability development look like?**

Applicants should refer to the published assessment criteria, which set out what assessors and RFNZ will consider when assessing the capability-development aspects of a proposal. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how they meet these criteria.

**How mature should the research idea be at the time of submission?**

The proposed research should be well considered and clearly described. Applicants are not expected to have already completed the research or answered the key research questions, but assessors will be looking for a credible, well-thought-through proposal with a clear research purpose.

**Must novelty come from an entirely new idea or technology?**

No. Novelty and innovation can arise in different ways. This may include an entirely new idea or combining existing science or research in a new way. Applicants should clearly explain the novelty of their proposed research in the Science Excellence section and address the published assessment criteria.

**What happens if an applicant considers Vision Mātauranga not relevant to their proposal, but an assessor considers it relevant?**

Applicants should clearly explain their position on the relevance of Vision Mātauranga. It is acceptable to state that Vision Mātauranga is not relevant where this is genuinely the case. Assessors will consider the applicant's explanation and assess the proposal against the published assessment criteria.

**Can Artificial Intelligence be used to improve the English or presentation of a proposal?**

Yes. Applicants may use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to improve their application, but they remain responsible for the content, the suitability and validity of cited sources, and the originality of the proposal. Proposals should be clear and understandable when submitted.

**For AI-related proposals, should applicants explain how their project will remain relevant if the technology changes before or during the contract?**

Applicants should provide their best project plan for the two-year contract based on the information available at the time of application. Proposals should demonstrate awareness of relevant risks, credible mitigation strategies and the ability to adapt where necessary. For funded contracts, MBIE can discuss changes where developments in the field require them.

**Can Talent Development support the development of scientific services for industry?**

Potentially. The proposal must meet the purpose and assessment criteria for Talent Development, including Science Excellence. Applicants should clearly demonstrate how the proposed development of scientific services meets the published Science Excellence criterion.

## Project teams and eligible costs

**Can additional team members be included alongside the Principal Investigator?**

Yes. Additional team members may be included where they contribute to delivery of the proposal and the associated costs fit within the available budget.

**Can a PhD student funded through another source contribute to a Talent Development project?**

Yes. A PhD student funded elsewhere may contribute where their involvement strengthens the proposal for the future research leader. However, a PhD student would generally be too early in their career to be the future research leader supported through the Talent Development mechanism. Any staff and FTE identified in the proposal are expected to be available from the start of the contract.

**Can a researcher hold a Talent Development award and another fellowship at the same time?**

Yes, provided the Principal Investigator can meet the minimum 0.4 FTE requirement for Talent Development and the requirements of the other fellowship. The same activity cannot be funded twice. The Talent Development proposal must therefore be clearly distinct from, and not duplicate work supported through another funded contract.

**Can Talent Development funding be used to purchase large-ticket equipment?**

The Transition Research Fund cannot fund capital expenditure (CapEx). Applicants should refer to the proposal template for eligible expenditure and discuss any uncertainty about equipment costs with their research office.

**Can Talent Development funding be used to pay overseas collaborators?**

Yes. Funding can be used to contract overseas collaborators. However, the majority of the work must be conducted in New Zealand. Applicants should consider the proportion of funding being spent overseas and clearly demonstrate how the collaborator contributes to the proposal.

**Can Talent Development funding support leadership courses or programmes in New Zealand or overseas?**

Potentially, where the activity contributes to delivery of the research project. A small, well-justified training component may be appropriate where it supports the project objectives. However, a proposal focused primarily on leadership training would not meet the primary objectives of the mechanism and would be unlikely to be funded.

**Is guidance on eligible expenditure available before applicants submit their proposal?**

Yes. The Talent Development proposal template provides guidance on eligible expenditure and is available on the Talent Development Call for Proposals webpage.

## Alignment with the Investment Plan

**Does alignment with a larger Technology for Prosperity priority provide a competitive advantage?**

Not necessarily. Applicants should select the priority that their proposal most naturally aligns with and clearly demonstrate that alignment. RFNZ will make final funding decisions using portfolio balancing across the priority areas, considering the number and quality of proposals aligned with each priority and the indicative size of the priorities.

**How can applicants determine whether their proposal aligns with a pillar?**

MBIE cannot confirm the alignment or eligibility of a specific proposal before it is submitted. Applicants must demonstrate how their proposal aligns with the Technology for Prosperity Pillar Investment Plan, including one of its priorities and the relevant outcome areas.

## Assessment and funding decisions

**How will RFNZ decide which proposals progress to panel assessment?**

Proposals will first be assessed by three independent assessors from the College of Assessors and ranked according to their assessment scores. RFNZ will then consider the gazetted eligibility criteria, the assessor scores and comments, and the ranked list when deciding which proposals progress to the panel meeting.

**Why will feedback not be provided for funded proposals?**

Feedback is primarily intended to help unsuccessful applicants understand how they could strengthen future applications. Funded applicants will receive learning and feedback during the delivery of their contracted project. This approach also supports the efficient use of resources.

## Future funding and research impact

**Will the approach to research impact be reviewed for future funding?**

The Transition Research Fund is time limited and is planned to run once. Any future funding arrangements would consider relevant policy settings, including the approach to research impact. More broadly, RFNZ, MBIE and the Prime Minister's Science, Innovation and

Technology Advisory Council are considering how the impact of science investment can be understood at both the individual funding mechanism and wider science-system levels.