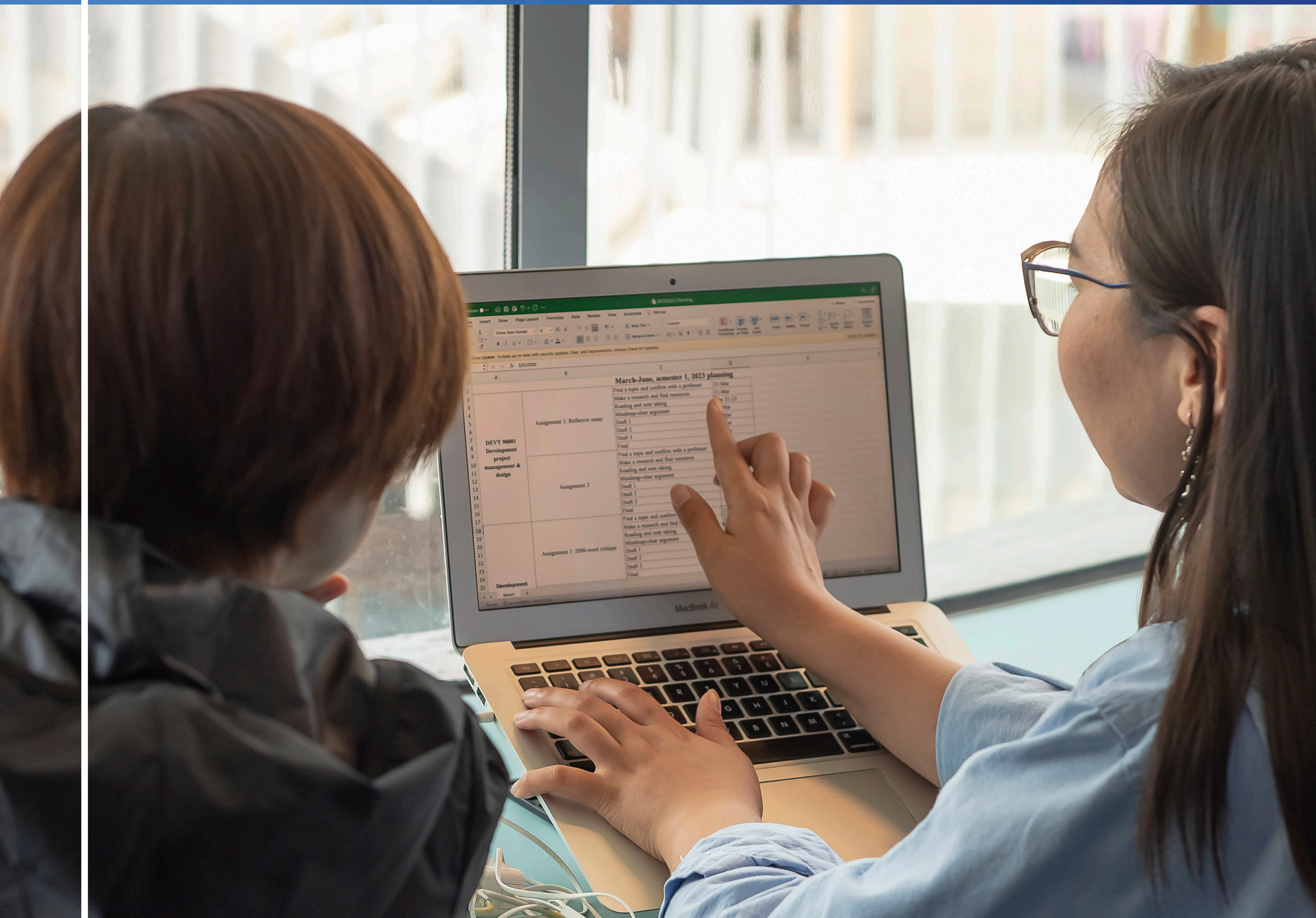
Where to start with Research Funding Applications



THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

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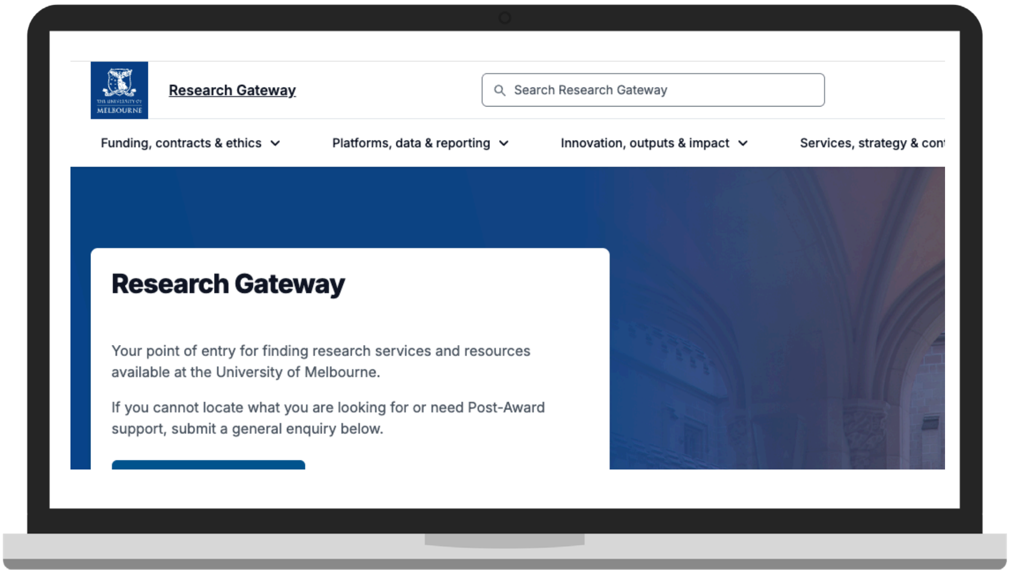
Purpose and scope

This resource provides MPSGH-focused guidance on the administrative and budget aspects of applying for funding. The information is designed to help academics within MSPGH applying for funding as CIA (or equivalent) - particularly Early to Mid-Career Researchers (EMCRs) who may not have substantial experience in grant submission processes.

The information presented here is not intended to help you with the scientific/quality aspects of your grant proposal. For help preparing a high-quality research proposal, see Research Gateway.



Where can I get information about funding opportunities?

The University of Melbourne (UoM) Research Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC) team provides coverage for a full range of funding schemes. Refer to the general Research Funding page for a broad view of funding opportunities. RIC and MDHS Research Support & Evaluation coordinate a PIVOT email list containing current information about many schemes.

MRFF/NHMRC/ARC grant opportunities

- NHMRC schemes
- Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) schemes
- ARC schemes
- Other Australian grants

Note that there are often informal/ad-hoc/investigator initiated funding opportunities. Use your professional networks to raise your awareness of other funding schemes; consult your collaborators and colleagues to find out more.

Tenders

The website tenders.net provides a searchable resource to find current calls for tender, including those from government agencies, nongovernmental agencies (NGOs), and commercial entities. Search alerts (emailed notifications) are available to subscribers. Some centre managers collate these opportunities and distribute across the centres.

MAS/PAS panel

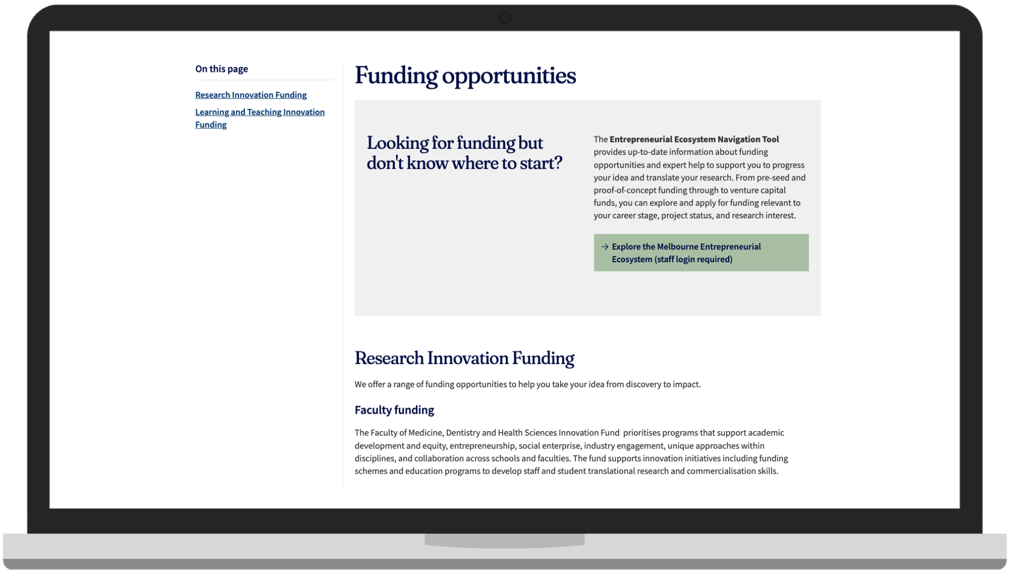
There are some tender opportunities that are only advertised to a panel of pre-approved suppliers. The University is a member of over 20 panels. Information about opportunities that come through this channel can be found here - Tenders

Philanthropic funding

There are some formal philanthropic schemes which may appear in the PIVOT email or be circulated through the Faculty or School newsletters. Other philanthropic funding is found through personal and professional connections. In some cases, Philanthropic schemes will only accept one or two applications per Institution. If that is the case, check with the Advancement team to find out the internal process for selection. This will usually involve internal deadlines well in advance of the scheme deadlines to allow for processing and selection of expressions of interest.

Internal UoM schemes

Refer to this page for MDHS Research Innovation Funding, including Dean's Innovation Grants, MDHS Innovation Seed Grants, and the Michael Hirshorn Medical Research Commercialisation Fund. Funding opportunities aimed at researcher development are collated here.



Other

To fund research-enabling equipment and infrastructure, see:

- MDHS Large Equipment Grant scheme
- UoM Research Infrastructure Investment Fund Collaborative Equipment Grant scheme (RIIF CEG)
- Melbourne Collaborative Research Infrastructure Program (MCRIP)

Other external opportunities can also be found on the Research Gateway website.

How to prepare a funding application

Logistics of applying for funding

Discuss the funding opportunity with your supervisor and/or mentor

As early as possible, discuss with your supervisor:

- the research idea,
- your suitability to lead the proposal (and what this means for your existing workload and research funding),
- potential co-CIs, AIs, and partners,
- the strategic benefits of applying. This conversation could include:
  - How this project could benefit your own track record
  - How the grant could support the team's strategic direction
  - Whether the grant is a good opportunity to develop partnerships

- the financial implications of applying. Some questions to consider are:
  - Will the grant allow you to be able to pay your full salary? Or the salary of a research assistant? (NB these smaller grants can be useful for building track record)
  - Is the available budget sufficient to cover the cost of the proposed project?
  - Is there a requirement for co-funding from partner organisations?
  - Will the funder pay the indirect cost multiplier? Are there budget implications for the unit/ centre?

These discussions are best initiated by you as the potential driver of the application. Additional advice and support are available from the Centre Research Program Managers / Business Managers.

Determine sponsor and RIC timelines

Typically, there are multiple timelines that are important to be across. These include timelines set by the funder/sponsor, those set by RIC, and those required by internal MSPGH processes. Map these out at the start of the process.

Funder/sponsor submission deadlines

These are hard deadlines. Do not assume extensions will be granted. If you miss these deadlines, your application is unlikely to be considered.

NHMRC and MRFF schemes have an early deadline for minimum data submission. Minimum data normally comprises the lead investigator name, project title and a short project synopsis. If you miss this deadline, you will be unable to submit a full application. Submitting your minimum data does not mean you have to submit an application.

RIC submission deadlines

These internal deadlines allow for strategic and/or compliance reviews by RIC. For some schemes, RIC will organise peer review. It is important that you contact RIC if you think there will be issues in meeting these internal deadlines, as there can sometimes be some flexibility.

What is strategic review?

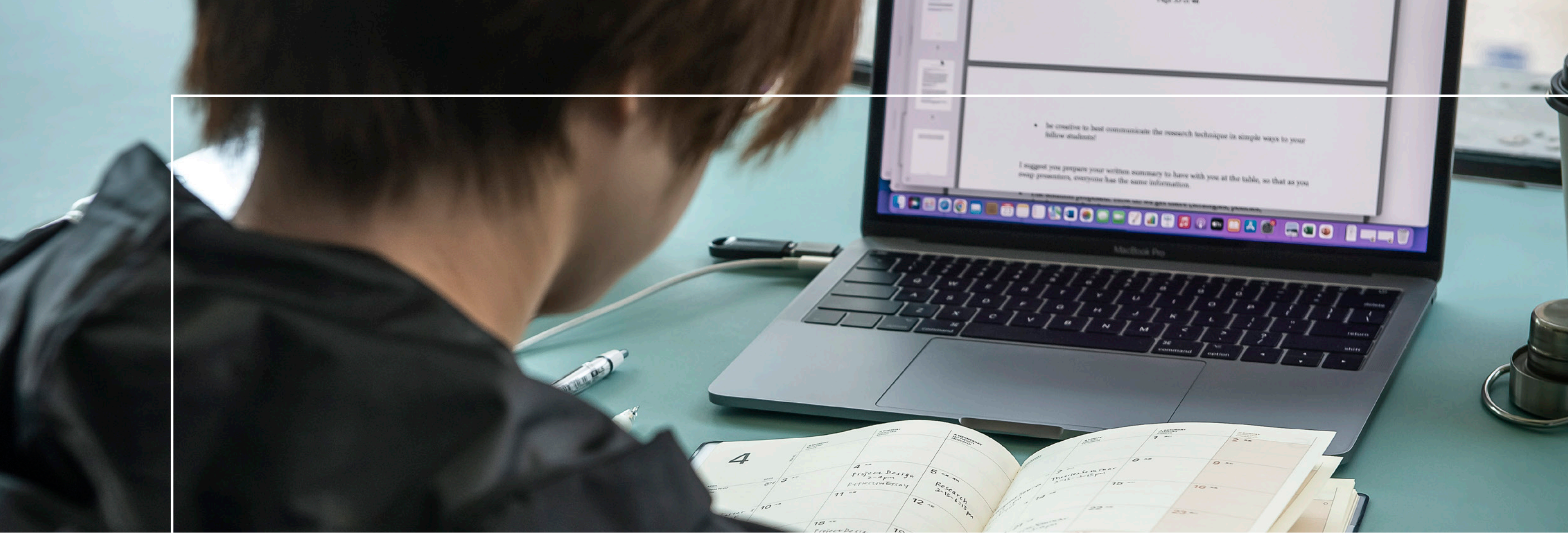
This is where RIC is able to provide advice that concerns the strategic relevance/strength of the application. Feedback obtained at this stage of the proposal can be incredibly useful to ensure that your application is aligned with the scheme aims and objectives, is considering the guidelines and seems a good fit for the scheme. RIC may be able to advise on additional partners to strengthen the application. Strategic review is often well before minimum data is due, so you do need to be organised.

What is a compliance review?

This will normally occur right before final submission. The compliance review will ensure that your application is compliant with the guidelines – this will include ensuring that your investigators are eligible, your formatting is correct, word/page limit are appropriate and the budget complies with guidelines. Since many funders are strict about guideline compliance (down to small formatting details) and will readily reject noncompliant applications, the compliance check should not be overlooked!

What is a peer-review?

For many big schemes, RIC is able to organise peers to review your application. This will strengthen the application's scientific merit and communication of ideas.



MSPGH administrative deadlines

HINT: There are some things that can be really time consuming. Plan appropriately - these are CIA responsibilities!

- Ensuring that all investigators have submitted the correct documentation - this can include:
  - CVs in correct format
  - Track records in correct format
  - Up-to-date Sapphire profiles
- Letters of support (in correct format) from Partners
- Obtaining University approval for the budget and submission

Advise RIC that you intend to apply

For all funding opportunities, it is important to contact RIC to let them know you intend to apply by submitting a Notice of Intent. Do this as early as possible to maximise the assistance RIC can provide. It is also used by the MSPGH Research Committee to determine if additional School support needs to be provided.

Please submit the Notice of Intent (NOI) in Cayuse as early as possible to provide RIC with your contact details. Completing the NOI will ensure that RIC can notify you of communications from the funders/sponsors, including updates/corrections to guidelines and timelines. The NOI also facilitates internal peer review that RIC may be organising (not available for all schemes).

HINT: Stay engaged with RIC and your Centre/Unit Portfolio Manager. RIC will provide support for strategic, administrative, and budget aspects of the grant preparation process.

Likewise, your Portfolio Manager will support you in budgeting and administrative processes, helping you prepare and route forms, and ensuring signoffs are received with time to spare.

Both RIC and your Portfolio Manager are valuable sources of support – you do not need to go it alone! Keep them abreast of your progress in preparing the application.

Understand the scope and requirements of the funding opportunity

Read the guidelines thoroughly to understand the objectives and details of the grant scheme. Ensure that you understand:

- [ ] The kind of proposals the scheme is aiming to fund, and whether your proposal aligns with the primary objectives of the scheme.

- [ ] What the grant/contract will fund:
    - Many grant schemes (e.g., NHMRC Targeted Calls for Research) will not fund the salary of any named investigators or only cover a proportion of the salary. Where salary levels are stipulated by the funder, check how their salary rate for FTE1.0 compares with UoM salary rates (using the [Research Costing and Pricing Tool]() (RCPT)). When there is a shortfall, you will either need to ensure before submission that there will be additional salary coverage from another source (sometimes this is provided by the University/Faculty/School but not always), or, you will need to ensure that the proposed work can be achieved using only the funding provided.
    - Some schemes require the lead investigator to be based in a particular jurisdiction - within Australia, within a particular state of Australia, or within a specific region (e.g., rural).

- [ ] The types of required partnerships and whether there is an expectation of co-funding from the University or other partners.

Determine your eligibility to apply, and understand the application process

Eligibility can be complex and needs careful consideration.

- [ ] For Early and Mid-Career Research (EMCR) schemes – do not make assumptions – check the definition of EMCR given by the scheme of interest. Different funding schemes have different definitions of career disruption and the amount of supporting evidence for career disruption can vary.

- [ ] In some cases, a CI can only be named on a single application in that round. Ensure that all your proposed investigators are aware of these limitations.

- [ ] Some NHMRC schemes have rules that govern how many grants can be held simultaneously. For example, if you hold an NHMRC Investigator grant, there may be limitations on when you can apply for NHMRC Ideas grants. Check all of these.
    - For the NHMRC, there is an online tool that can help you work this out: [Investigator and Ideas Grants eligibility tool | NHMRC]()

- [ ] Some schemes specifically target people in rural/remote areas. In some cases, this means that the **work** must focus on rural areas, and in other cases it indicates that the investigators must **reside** in rural areas.

Contact RIC **early to verify your eligibility**, including all the considerations and potential constraints outlined above.

HINT: Always ask RIC for help!

RIC is often able to help you understand things which may not be clear in the guidelines.

The best RIC contact is through service now - Research: service now request - Research Helpline.

Specialised assistance can also be requested through the email contacts below but start with the helpline initially:

- ARC Discovery: ric-arcdiscovery@unimelb.edu.au
- ARC Linkage: ric-arclinkage@unimelb.edu.au
- ARC DECRA: ric-arcdecra@unimelb.edu.au

- NHMRC Research Support Schemes: nhmrc-project@unimelb.edu.au
- NHMRC Fellowship/Scholarship schemes: nhmrc-people-support@unimelb.edu.au

- MRFF: enquiries-mrff@unimelb.edu.au
- International Research: international-research@unimelb.edu.au
- Major initiatives (NHMRC CRE, ARC ITRP, ARC CoE, CRC, CRC-P, DST group CTD etc): ric-majorinitiatives@unimelb.edu.au

Particularly for tender applications, RIC will be able to provide specific, tailored support. RIC-proposals@unimelb.edu.au

Discuss the funding opportunity with your portfolio manager

Early consultation with your Portfolio Manager is essential as they are positioned to provide important advice on:

The budget, including whether the Research Costing and Pricing Tool (RCPT) is required for the scheme.

Overhead costs and an appropriate indirect cost multiplier must be considered.

If applicable, processes required to apply for a reduction in indirect cost multiplier. Please check with your Centre/Unit portfolio manager for the form for indirect cost reduction/waiver.

The process and timeframe to obtain the required Centre and School signoffs. – Approvals process

Determine the internal/external source(s) of funding

In some cases, there is an expectation of internal or external funding for the scheme.

- For some schemes, secured cash co-contributions are mandatory.
- For other schemes, in-kind contributions are sufficient without cash co-contributions. Cash-contributions are seen favourably, even if not required.

Ensure that you understand these requirements and will be able to meet them, particularly with respect to cash co-contributions.

Determine the indirect cost multiplier for external funding

Different schemes have different rules. Here are some useful definitions:

On-costs: On-costs to salaries cover the University's obligations to Workers Compensation, Superannuation and Long Service Leave.

Cost recovery multiplier: This is applied to all salary and non-salary components in the grant application. This Schedule-A-Cost-Recovery-Multiplier-MPF1347.pdf sets out the minimum cost recovery multiplier required.

The RCPT will calculate these indirect costs automatically.

HINT: Your portfolio manager has a wealth of knowledge about budget and process

Please also acknowledge that your portfolio manager is very busy, so ensure that you are as organised as possible, and provide as much time as you can for your requirements

Your Portfolio Manager can help calculate the appropriate expenditure budget for your proposal with respect to the funding scheme.

Determine the distribution of funding internally and externally

Most grant proposals involve collaborations between academics at different Units/Centres/Schools/Faculties/Institutes and/or community and industry partners. The budgeting process should reflect this. Agreements must be made early and transparently, defining the distribution of funding in unambiguous terms. This will ensure the project can progress smoothly if funded, and help to avoid potential tensions among investigators. Speak with your supervisor, or academic mentor if you are unsure how to best approach these conversations. Discuss with your Portfolio Manager how to represent payments to collaborators in the RCPT. For example, listing payments to collaborators in the non-salary section as Expert services will ensure overheads are not taken out before the funds are transferred.

Drafting your application

Complete your research proposal

- [ ] Build your investigator team, ensuring that budget discussions are held early and candidly with all parties.
- [ ] Be aware of any formal letters of support that are required (and if they are required in a particular format/template) and initiate this process early.
- [ ] Ensure that you fully understand the guidelines and application process, and that your research proposal is compliant (format, word count, figures, tables, etc.).
- [ ] Seek strategic grant advice.
- [ ] Write the proposal as early as possible, so there is plenty of time for feedback and crafting.
- [ ] Use resources such as the UoM successful grant library: Search : Grants Research Library

Create an expenditure budget using internal/external tools

General research costing and pricing support can be found at the Research Gateway and Knowledge Base (for FAQs).

Considerations when budgeting/Things to discuss with your portfolio manager:

1. **What is the cost recovery multiplier on UoM salaries and direct research costs, and when should this multiplier be applied?**

2. **What budget implications arise from NHMRC/MRFF/ARC Personnel Support Packages (PSPs) being lower than UoM salaries?**

   When budgeting personnel in these Category 1 grants, be aware that for each 1.0 PSP, the funder will cover approximately 60% of the staff member's salary. Who covers the deficit?

- In the case of Fellowships, the Faculty will often cover the difference.
- In the case of grants, it is up to the CI to manage the shortfall. Discuss this with your research team, Portfolio Manager, and Unit Head.

3. **What is the Research Costing Pricing Tool (RCPT) and when do I need to use it?**

   The RCPT is used to budget for most projects. You do not need to use it for NHMRC, ARC, and some MRFF applications, but it may still be useful to understand UoM staff costs, including standard oncosts (e.g., if a 1.0 multiplier is set. The cost recovery multiplier on the staff costs page can be adjusted if needed by ticking the 'override default multiplier' box). Note that salary funding (PSPXX) from these funders is not at the same level as UOM salaries and therefore FTE requirements may be lower.

   For most other schemes, the RCPT must be completed and attached when the budget is submitted for signoff by the delegate.

   Note: a RCPT user manual is available via the link above. Always download the latest RCPT because it is updated often. **Do not share the RCPT with people external to UoM, even if they are your collaborators/partners**.

4. **What are in-kind contributions, when do they need to be officially included, and how do I calculate them?**

   In-kind contributions are contributions of a good or a service, other than money, made towards the proposal. Examples may include staff time spent on supervision or project advisory meetings, and computational/data storage platforms.

   In-kind contributions should be included in a budget when the funding scheme has provision to include them. Many funders look favourably on in-kind contributions from the lead institution and its collaborators and partners.

   In-kind contributions should be costed at full price, with the full applicable multiplier. The RCPT contains functionality to cost in-kind contributions.

   To cost the in-kind contributions of technology platforms (e.g., data storage and/or compute), use the Research Price Estimator. If you are unsure about the technical platforms required for your project, consult Research Computing Services via support request.

5. **How do I cost technical aspects of my project, e.g., research data management, software development, etc?**

   Staff time is typically required to cover the technical aspects of a project, and this must be costed separately to the data and computer platforms provided by UoM. If your research team is not equipped to support the informatics aspects of your project and/or you are unsure how to budget for them, contact the MSPGH Informatics Team for advice.

   mspgh-informatics@unimelb.edu.au

The Research Funding, Costing and Pricing Policy (MPF1347) outlines UoM budget requirements. Unless clearly stipulated in the guidelines, all research budgets must comply with MPF1347.

Many Category 1 schemes (including most NHMRC, MRFF, and ARC schemes) do not allow the charging of overheads, multipliers, and full salaries. For most other schemes, if you cannot comply with the multiplier, a reduction in the multiplier may be granted following the submission of a waiver request (see below).

Prepare an MSPGH waiver form (if applicable)

If your budget cannot comply with the research funding, costing and pricing policy (i.e., the multiplier makes it impossible), you may submit a waiver request/multiplier reduction. Each waiver request requires approval of the MDHS Dean. Please complete the MSPGH requirements before requesting MDHS approval. Your portfolio manager can assist you with this.

Importantly, a waiver request is not required if the funder clearly states that indirect costs are disallowed.

If you think a waiver/multiplier reduction will be required:

- Speak with your Unit Head and Portfolio Manager about the issue as early as possible. For some funders, RIC may be able to advise if there is existing agreement around mutually accepted multipliers.
- You will need to provide a compelling case for having the multiplier reduced/waived. As an initial guide, justification may be proposed on grounds such as:
    - Project or partnership strategic value: funding is aligned with key long term strategic research priorities for the Faculty/School/Department/Centre.
    - Partnership characteristics: small business; start-up, charity, non-for-profit organisations, government agencies (noting an agreed rate or precedent may already exist for some agencies).

Submitting your application

Prepare Approval Form

Most applications require approval from the Head of School. An approval form has been designed to ensure that this approval is obtained through the correct channels. This approval form provides context to your application and request for approval, including any details on cost recovery multipliers and budgets that they need to be aware of.

Most applications require approval from:

- ☐ **Head of Unit**
- ☐ **Head of Centre**
- ☐ **Head of School**

Your portfolio manager can assist you with obtaining approvals. Please complete this form initially which is available on the MSPGH intranet under operations

Submit the application and relevant documents to your Portfolio Manager

To obtain Head of School signoff, your application, supporting documents, and approval form must be submitted to your Portfolio Manager at least five days ahead of the RIC deadline. Note that you can submit a near-final draft of the application and final proposed budget for internal approval in order to meet internal deadlines. Your Portfolio Manager will help to coordinate the signoff process; they will let you know when the application has been approved and signed off, ready for submission.

Submit application to RIC

For many schemes, including ARC, NHMRC and MRFF, RIC requires that the application is submitted to them first for a compliance check. This is an important step to ensure your application meets the scheme's guidelines and will be accepted by the funding body for review.

Submit application externally

Many funders have a specific submission platform (e.g., Sapphire, ARC RMS) but for others, applications are submitted via email. Ensure that you submit your application (and all required documents) on time, in the correct format with the correct file name. Please upload any proposal into Cayuse so that RIC can assist with submission and if awarded, acceptance of funding and activation.

For platforms such as Sapphire and RMS, ensure that your investigator profile is up to date, and ask your co-investigators to review and update their profiles as needed. Ideally, investigator profiles should be checked and updated in advance of submitting the application.

Do NOT include the Research Costing Pricing Tool in any submissions – it is confidential, for internal UoM use only!

Make a record of the application on Cayuse

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

How is the process different for tenders and commercial applications?

Compared to Category 1 grants, tenders/commercial calls often have:

- Timeframes that are much shorter from opportunity release to submission deadline.
- Additional requirements for applications, e.g., risk registers, legal requirements, Intellectual Property (IP) ownership, etc.
- Fewer (often none) budget guidelines.

Many tenders and commercial opportunities are handled on a more case-by-case basis than Category 1 grants (which have more established patterns). Engage your Unit Head, Portfolio Manager and RIC as early as possible for support with this process.

What if it is not a formal, advertised opportunity, but something that we have been invited to do?

While this situation may mean that you have greater negotiation power with the funders, applications and budgets still need to comply with the Research, Costing and Pricing policy.

What if I have been asked to provide a quote to provide some research/evaluation services?

All quotes still need to comply with the Research, Costing and Pricing policy. If this makes the work untenable, speak with your Unit Head and Portfolio manager about whether it is possible and strategic to apply for a waiver (as described above).

What if I am not leading the application, how does this impact the process?

You have a lot less responsibility for the administration if you are not leading the application. You will still need to ensure that any budget allocated to you to complete the work is (a) adequate for the work required and (b) complies with the Research, Costing and Pricing Policy

Some schemes require that you obtain a letter of support from the University. Speak with your portfolio manager and obtain HoD approval

Why do I need to apply the multiplier, and where does the money from the multiplier go?

Follow this link for more information about budgeting: Knowledge Base KB0024587

Speak with your portfolio manager

What is an APP (Academic Pursuit Project) account? What can I use this money for?

Most research funding received will be set up as a separate project PRJ_XXX with details including required start and finish dates; deliverables etc however sometimes you may be asked to complete some smaller consultation that cannot be administered as a project. At other times you may receive a portion of the indirect costs applied to major projects if you are the CIA. In these instances, these funds are put into the APP account and available to use within a three-year period for research related support at your discretion – eg conference travel, research assistance funding, publication costs if not covered by open access. If you need an APP account to be set up, please discuss with your portfolio manager in the first instance. You will be able to see the APP account PRJ_ in workday once actioned and what funds are available. Any charges against your APP account will need financial approval from the HOD and possibly HOS dependent on value. Speak to your supervisor in the first instance if you have any questions on suitability of the expense.

What are the administrative things that I need to do post-award?

Let your portfolio manager know that you have been awarded funding. They will assist you to finalise the acceptance of the funding eg complete a final RCPT with award amount; finalise start and end date of the project and what will be spent and when; and assist RIC to move the proposal from Cayuse to signing of the agreement with the funder and then activation of the project into workday. Once RIC have activated the project, you will be able to view this in workday.

Cayuse / Workday

The University of Melbourne has implemented new software for research funding as of May 2025 – Cayuse for pre-award and Workday for post award / finance. Your portfolio manager will assist you to learn how to use workday and you will have an overview of your research project lifecycle. Workday will remind you of required milestones and deliverables of the project; financial responsibilities; and assist you with staff that you may manage on your research project.

Contracts

For successful grants, if you have people at other Institutes or other faculties or schools within the University of Melbourne contributing to the work, it is likely that you will need to set up contracts/sub-contracts. This is the responsibility of the CIA – please contact your portfolio manager to assist you with this if you are the lead CIA. If you are the receiver of a subcontract also let your portfolio manager know as they can assist you to claim these funds and administer the subcontract.

Multi-Institute Agreements (MIA)

The MRFF, ARC and NHMRC have standard agreements that need to be in place between collaborating institutes. These are call multi-institute agreements (MIA). These state the names of all partners, and clarify the budget distribution between institutes. RIC will help you manage the development and execution of these agreements. Please also let your portfolio manager assist you with this

FOR codes/SEO codes. All proposals in Cayuse and projects in Workday require you to identify the FOR (Fields of research) and SEO (socio-economic objective) codes relevant to your research

The University of Melbourne collects data on research outputs published by staff and students of the University. This data provides the University with valuable information on the research activity of its staff and students and is used:

- To populate Find an Expert, the University's public Researcher Profile
- To inform academic performance review and strategic development
- In government submissions such as the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) initiative
- To make research outputs publicly available via the open access repository Minerva Access
- To enable compliance with ARC and NHMRC Open Access policies.

Managing budgets

The RCPT and funder budget template initially identifies where you have allocated salary and expenses for the life of the project. During this lifecycle, things may change and your portfolio manager and PAF's (post award finance team) can assist you with understanding your budget and any financial reconciliations that can be required by the funder. The portfolio manager and RIC can assist you with queries to the funder and with any variations that may be needed.

Managing deliverables

Workday and the funder will remind you that deliverables are due. These could be milestones in the research that need to be acknowledged or deliverables before further funding will be released. Understand the guidelines and agreement that you have signed with the funder and work with your portfolio manager well in advance of the due date to obtain required financial documentation.

Where can I find information about my accounts?

Workday – "project manager hub". Your portfolio manager also has information of a portfolio view of multiple projects if you have several active projects at one time. Arrange for regular meetings with your portfolio manager to discuss your project/s and progression if you wish. They are there to assist you with active projects and developing new funding proposals.

Links

Research reporting and coding : Research Gateway