Table of recommendations from NARF regarding the current NHMRC Grant Scheme and Review Process which came out of a NARF meeting held at the Queensland Brain Institute on the 17th of June 2019. This meeting was attended by NARF executive, Director and members of the Research Office at UQ, additional researchers from UQ and NARF members online. In addition, we received written submissions from several researchers, including from some who attended the Investigator and Synergy grant review panels.

Topic	Recommendations	Benefits
Application Process – General	Allow CI to apply for one Investigator, and one Ideas grant in the same round, and keep both.	Capping: reduction of requirement for ineligible grants to be assessed. Currently there appears to be ~2,000 Investigator Grant and ~3,000 Ideas Grant applications which is contrary to the predicted model and has resulted in burdening peer-review panels, and will result in poor success rates. Allows for more collaborative grants as risk of having Ideas Grant ruled as ineligible is removed due to involvement of a named chief investigator on a successful Investigator Grant. Could allow the Investigator Grants deadline to be earlier and therefore not over Christmas-New Year break, which impacts on those with young families in particular.
Peer-Review Process	Provide feedback to applicants that should reflect the given score (due diligence in peer review).	Promotes transparency and accountability. Fosters better science.
Peer-Review Process	Peer-review guidelines need to be in place before a round starts. All information in one location, preferably on the NHMRC website. Info on GrantConnect is diffuse and difficult to navigate.	Allows applicants to understand how applications will be assessed. Promotion of transparency of assessment process.
Peer-Review Process	Resize grant assessor panels to avoid superpanels with a spread of expertise contusive to randomization of the outcome. NHMRC funded people should be required to support/participate in the peer review process.	Reduces the number of applications to be reviewed by one panel. Potentially will reduce the amount of conflict of interest. More likely that panel members familiar with disciplines will be involved in the review process.

Peer-Review Process	Allow for external reviewers to avoid over-reliance on non-expert super-panel members.	External reviewers provide expert feedback to applicants and panel.
Peer-Review Process	Allow for a mix of experienced and early career researchers on panels. Reinstate assigner academy and associated Externals. On what basis is a panel formed and by who?	Promotes better and more complete assessments by providing different views and experience. Allows for young investigators to learn from colleagues and results in a larger pool of potential reviewers. Allows for recognition of innovation and creativity by assessors.
Peer-Review Process	Review Conflict of Interest (COI) policy and improve processes to record COI. In some fields (e.g. genetics) with large numbers of co-authors from different institutions, some experts publish with many Australians in their field. They are penalized as their grants do not get reviewed by experts in the field (even though they may never have met many co-authors). Co-authoring with someone in the previous 5 years should not be an automatic high COI.	Having a more relaxed COI policy may overcome the dearth of available assessors for some disciplines. Reduces time spent on entering COI details in current system.
Peer-Review Process	Reinstate interviews after triage.	It is reasonable for EL1 and EL2 Emerging Leadership Fellows not to be interviewed. However, for Leadership Fellows (L1,2,3), which have replaced SRF, PRF, SPRF, interviews should be reinstated. At top level an L3 with $600K per year package would get $4M over 5 years, after non-expert assessor scores, no comments and no interviews. Due diligence needed.
Investigator Grants	More clarity in Statement of Expectations to understand differences between Leadership levels by providing eligibility table either based on current academic salary level (or equivalent) or elaborate on the Table 1 Guidance on relationships between NHMRC Fellowship schemes and	This would avoid confusion and uncertainly of where applicants should position themselves. Clarity of expectations leads to better applications and better assessments.

	Investigator Grant Levels already provided.	
Investigator Grants	Allow the salary component of an Investigator Grant to start from the end date of an existing fellowship (if applicable) during the funding period.	This would allow for continuity of salary for the investigator and research program.
Investigator Grants	Break up the two Emerging Leader levels according to the number of years post-PhD (e.g. 0-5 for EL1 and 6-10 for EL2) allowing for Career Disruptions. EL 1 should be aligned with CJ Martin Fellowships (most productive fellowship in the history of the NHMRC) and encourage the possibility of an oversea post-doc.	As for Leadership levels, Emerging Leader level 1 and 2 need to be more clearly defined to allow assessors to properly consider track record in terms of relative to opportunities. This should exclude full professors from applying at these levels and creating an imbalance in the scheme
Investigator Grants	Review capping restrictions (number of CI slots) inconsistencies across schemes. Draconian capping for Ideas grants, but unlimited for CTCS. We recommend alignment of both with more relaxed capping. Perhaps introduce a $ capping in the same way Investigator and Synergy grants. Note that large CTCS should be derived from the MRFF (to avoid double-dipping across NHMRC and MRFF).	Provides rationale for differences given there is no capping for Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies grants. Lifting or making caps less restrictive means Australian-based researchers would be competitive with other international leaders. May encourage top researchers to stay within Australia.
Investigator Grants	Review capping restrictions to allow researchers to hold an Investigator Grant and an Ideas Grant funding at the same time.	Provides realistic support for the research program and the research staff. Especially for Investigator grants that have low ranking and therefore little funds to carry out their entire research.
Investigator Grants	Ensure category descriptors and match up to guidelines.	This will aid applicants and assessors.
Investigator Grants	Allow Emerging Leader 1 to apply for and hold 1 Ideas Grant.	While the $50K p.a. RSP is a welcomed introduction, the funding is insufficient for most researchers to initiate and maintain an independent research program. The recommendation would be

		to allow the fellow to supplement their research income by allowing them to apply for other funding such as an Ideas Grant.
Investigator Grants	Introduction of a budget at application stage.	A budget commensurate with the applicant's project aims would go to determining scope and therefore feasibility. A budget could also inform the level of RSP required.
Investigator Grants	Re-introduce the following into applications: · Conference presentations · Achievements · Career Disruptions · Last 5 years publications · Career Trajectory and Vision · Budget	Current applications have insufficient information for robust assessment. Mention issue of assessing publications within predatory journals and presentations at predatory conferences. Panel members will not need to seek external confirmation of facts. Vision would inform appropriate required RSP level.
Investigator Grants	Allow existing fellows (previous RF scheme) to apply for RSP	Allow to achieve program goals. The current rules are deemed discriminatory to those holding Research Fellowships. Heads of Institutes, Faculty, School, Department with permanent salaries can apply for package, but Fellows cannot.
Investigator Grants	Provide more guidance on assessment of three sections.	More guidance on assessment translates into better applications. Less reliance on Assessor's home institutional grants office's interpretation and thus an even playing field.
Investigator Grants	Provide MRFF fellowships specifically for allied health professional.	Allows for clinicians to contribute to research otherwise they wont be competitive in the current Investigator Grants format. Better ROPE assessment.
Ideas Grants	Increase page limits for *Feasibility* or provide another section for team composition. Reinstate a section called Track Record (relative to opportunity), as per Investigator, Synergy and CTCS schemes. It is the best predictor of future productivity and success.	Allows for proper description of investigator roles and therefore better informs feasibility.

Ideas Grants	Consider introduction of grant schemes that bridge the gap between Ideas Grants and grants focussed on translating research	Need funding mechanism for continuing innovative work as Ideas is for new ideas. In our view, this is a consideration for MRFF funding. NARF will make a submission to the MRFF board and request a meeting with the Health minister.
Ideas Grants	More clarity on differences between Ideas Grants and Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies.	Would avoid unnecessary duplication of applications in different schemes.
Synergy Grants	What does 'cultural diversity' mean?	Please clarify in the guidelines
MRFF	Clarify role and scope of MRFF. We are writing a submission to the MRFF board to request clarification. Our view is that MRFF would be best used to take the strain off NHMRC, and allow it to fund more basic biomedical research (as NIH does).	Clarify misconception that MRFF does not fund fundamental research.
MRFF	Consider funding early career researcher Biotech Research Fellowships similar to CJ Martin but that instead of going overseas, the fellow is industry-based.	MRFF could help to generate such join NHMRC/MRFF Biotech fellowship.
MRFF	Should fund Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies.	CTCS should also have a capped budget (e.g. $500K per year). Additional funds could come via MRFF. Ideas Grants should have a similar budget cap, otherwise success rates will remain low for the coming years.