

2025

Non-Animal Technologies Network (NAT-Net) Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme

Guidelines [V25.08.01]

The University of New South Wales is the administering organisation of NAT-Net.
The NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme is made possible by funding from NSW Health.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CIA	Chief Investigator A
CiVM	Complex in vitro Model
EOI	Expression of Interest
EMCR	Early-Mid Career Researcher
NAT	Non-Animal Technologies
NAT-Net	Non-Animal Technologies Network

Call for Applications

The Non-Animal Technologies Network (NAT-Net) invites eligible researchers to apply for the NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme. Competitive grants will be offered to support collaborations led by NSW-based institutions, bringing together multiple partners **to drive groundbreaking discoveries and innovations in the use of Non-Animal Technologies (NAT)**.

Funding will be provided for two-year research projects from **March 2026**.

Under this competitive grant scheme, up to \$600,000 is available to fund **three project grants** of \$200,000 each.

Host organisations may submit a maximum of **two applications** each.

Eligible researchers are encouraged to apply, including clinician researchers, researchers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, and primary carers who have experienced career disruptions.

For the purposes of this Grant, the collaboration must:

- include a minimum of **two eligible research institutions**, at least one of which is based in NSW, along with other team members and partners;
- include **one NSW-based early-mid career researcher (EMCR)** as Chief Investigator (CI) (See [Relative to Opportunity Policy](#) for the full definition); and
- include no more than 8 Chief Investigators (A-H).

The NSW-based CIA will apply on behalf of the collaboration. UNSW (the NAT-Net administering institution) will enter into one funding agreement per Collaborative Grant with the eligible host organisation at which the CIA is employed, or eligible administering organisation if the funds are being administered separately. Any subsequent agreements with other eligible NSW host organisations who are collaborating on the grant are to be managed by that funded organisation.

Objectives

NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme aim to:

- fund research that makes groundbreaking discoveries in the field of medicine and health while developing and promoting alternative methods to animal use in research;
- encourage research collaboration, leadership, and capability building in the non-animal technologies NSW research environment;
- foster research excellence and increase the number of outstanding non-animal technologies researchers in NSW; and
- drive the development of high-quality, innovative non-animal technologies research in NSW.

Indicative Grant Timeline

Stage	Date
Expression of Interest (EOI) open	28 July 2025
Online Briefing	13 August 2025 12pm – 1pm AEST
EOIs close	25 August 2025, 12pm (AEST)
EOI review period	September
Applicants notified of EOI outcomes/ Full applications open	10 October 2025
Full Applications close	10 November 2025, 12pm (AEDT)
Full Applications review period	November - February
Applicants notified of full application outcome	February 2026
Funding awarded and projects commence	March 2026

Online Briefing for Applicants

A briefing for applicants will be held online on **Wednesday 13 August from 12pm – 1pm AEST**. Please register for the event using the following link: <https://events.humanitix.com/nat-net-briefing>.

Queries

Answers to frequently asked questions and updates on NAT-Net will become available on the [NAT-Net webpage](https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/nat-net/) (<https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/nat-net/>).

Any queries regarding the NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme may be directed by email to the NAT-Net Coordinator: Esther.Pronker@health.nsw.gov.au.

Submission of Applications

All applications must be submitted by the CIA via email to the NAT-Net Coordinator, Esther.Pronker@health.nsw.gov.au.

Applicants must use the NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant Scheme 2025 Application Forms (available on the [NAT-Net webpage](https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/nat-net/) (<https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/nat-net/>)). Please submit both a word and PDF version of the application and attach any other required documents as specified in the application forms.

All applications will receive an email to acknowledge receipt within 72 business hours. It is the applicant's responsibility to follow up if no acknowledgement email is received.

The maximum email size is **20MB**. Larger emails will be rejected by the NSW Health server, and you may not be notified that the email has been rejected.

Eligible Areas of Research

This grant supports researchers working on **next-generation innovations** in Non-Animal Technologies.

The term “Non-Animal Technologies” refers to novel approaches and technologies embracing numerous scientific methodologies aimed to accurately model human biology, including:

- laboratory developed and engineered *in vitro* cellular models such as organoids, engineered tissues and organs on a chip;

- computational methods, such as *in silico* simulation, machine learning, or artificial intelligence (AI); and
- in chemico* methods such as biochemical assays to assess potency.

NAT-Net welcomes projects using complex *in vitro* models (CiVMs) combining cell types from multiple organs (cardiovascular, neuronal, epithelial) to better replicate human disease where other technologies or other approaches are also a requirement to be brought in.

Only projects that demonstrate **substantial advancements** over current state-of-the-art technologies, incorporating **cutting-edge techniques** and **advanced methodologies**, will be considered eligible.

Projects should push the boundaries of existing solutions, advancing the field through novel applications or improvements that have the potential to significantly enhance practical outcomes in the non-animal technologies space. In that sense there is complementary, in the form of new combinations, or new technology supporting existing ones.

Excluded Areas of Research

Incremental improvements to an existing approach or technology.

Funding Amounts

Competitive Grants have a two-year duration. A total of up to \$200,000 may be awarded per grant. The total funding pool for this round is \$600,000.

Grants are for research projects or programs and can cover a combination of salaries of the research team (clinical and/or non-clinical), backfill for clinicians to quarantine research time, consumables, and equipment.

Funding Conditions and Exclusions

- Each collaboration must include a minimum of one NSW-based Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) as Chief Investigator (CI). An EMCR is defined as a researcher who is 10 years or less post-PhD, relative to opportunity (See [Relative to Opportunity Policy](#), on career disruptions which may be taken into consideration in determining time post-PhD).
- Researchers may submit a maximum of one application as a Chief Investigator A (CIA). Researchers may be named on additional applications as Chief Investigators.
- Research funded through a NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant must be conducted in NSW, either in the NSW health system or affiliated organisation (university, medical research institute, industry partner, community setting).
- NAT-Net recognises that interstate and international partners will strengthen collaborations and support success with future national funding opportunities and supports their inclusion. Collaborators external to NSW are expected to cover the cost of their participation in the collaboration.
- NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant must not be spent on capital works, general maintenance costs, organisational infrastructure or overheads (including administrative and other general costs of the recipient that are not directly associated with the performance of the Project), telephone/ communication systems, basic office equipment, such as desks and chairs, rent and the cost of utilities.
- Applicants are required to declare the source, duration, and level of funding already held for research in the subject area of the application. Applications must clearly describe the purpose of the additional funding and justify that the additional research adds value and is not duplicative.
- Funding is conditional on the CIA and the authorised representative of the host/administering organisation agreeing to the required declarations when submitting the application form. These declarations outline the obligations of each party.
- Applications will be awarded according to merit based on the selection criteria, with two caveats:

- a) If two applications are of equal merit, relative to opportunity, preference will be given to applicants that have not previously received a NSW Health grant.
- b) In the event that two applications are of similar merit and the CIA of one collaboration has more developed track records, due to holding one or more current national grants, the review panel may choose to recommend funding the collaboration with the less developed track record, in line with the Program's focus on building research capacity and capability in NSW.

Eligibility Criteria

Applications must meet all eligibility criteria.

Eligibility of Chief Investigator A

Researchers may submit a maximum of one application as a Chief Investigator A (CIA).

Based in NSW and employed by an eligible host/ administering organisation

The Chief Investigator A (CIA) and the majority of the team must reside in or plan to move to NSW for the duration of the grant and must be employed by an eligible NSW-based medical research institute, university, or non-government organisation.

Eligible research

The research project must be in the field of Non-Animal Technologies (See [Eligible Areas of Research](#)).

Submit a complete application

CIA must complete the application form fully, attach all relevant and required documentation, agree to the declarations on the form and receive certification from the host/ administering organisation.

Right to work in Australia

CIA must be an Australian citizen, a permanent resident of Australia, or have an appropriate working visa for the full term of the Grant.

Eligibility of the Collaboration

The Collaboration must:

- include a minimum of **two eligible research institutions**, at least one of which is based in NSW, along with other team members and partners;
- include **one NSW-based early-mid career researcher (EMCR)** as Chief Investigator (CI) (See [Relative to Opportunity Policy](#) for the full definition); and
- include no more than 8 Chief Investigators (A-H).

Host Organisation Requirements

NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grants may have multiple host organisations where the research will be conducted. The host organisation of CIA must be in NSW, will enter into the funding agreement with UNSW (the NAT-Net administering institution) and will then enter into subsequent funding agreements with other host organisations. The host organisation may

choose to have the funds administered by a separate administering organisation who will enter into the agreement with UNSW and take on other responsibilities (see below).

The host organisation must be in NSW, conduct health and medical research, and be one of the following:

- a university;
- an independent medical research institute;
- a not-for-profit organisation; or
- a local health district or other public health organisation.

The host organisation will provide the appropriate infrastructure support for the research project, including wet/dry lab space, computer equipment, and desk space.

The host organisation may also choose to provide additional in-kind and cash support to the project.

All support should be detailed in the application form and will be assessed against the selection criteria during the review process.

An authorised representative of the host organisation is required to review the application form and to certify that the organisation complies with the requirements of the grant.

If the host organisation is a NSW Health organisation, grant funds must be paid to an administering organisation that can manage funds across financial years as the full funding amount will be paid upfront. Please refer to administering organisation requirements.

Administering Institution Requirements

An administering organisation is only required where the funds are held by a separate organisation to the host organisation.

In such cases, the **administering organisation** will enter into the funding agreement with UNSW, manage the funds, enter into subsequent agreements with collaborating organisations where required, submit financial reports and coordinate other reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement.

Grant funds must be paid to an administering organisation that can manage funds across financial years as the full funding amount will be paid upfront.

The administering organisation must be:

- a university;
- a medical research institute; or
- a not-for-profit organisation that conducts health and medical research in NSW.

Note: For-profit organisations are not eligible to be host or administering organisations or to apply for funding but may be partners on the grant.

Relative to Opportunity Policy

To be eligible for the NAT-Net Research Pillar Competitive Grant, the research team must include one NSW-based EMCR as CI. An EMCR is defined as a researcher within 10 years of the conferral (award) of their PhD, measured from the official date on the testamur to the EOI submission deadline.

Applicants' track records will be assessed by expert reviewers against the selection criteria relative to opportunity, which means in the context of their career stage and personal circumstances. These circumstances might include career disruption due to pregnancy, major illness/injury and/or carer responsibilities, as well as other relative to opportunity considerations as outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC's) Relative to Opportunity Policy. Please refer to the NHMRC policy [here](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/nhmrc-relative-opportunity-policy) (<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/nhmrc-relative-opportunity-policy>).

Selection Criteria

The application process consists of two stages: **Expression of Interest (EOI)** and **Full Application**.

All applications that meet the eligibility criteria will be assessed against the following selection criteria. In addressing the selection criteria, applicants should specifically highlight the relevance to non-animal technologies research.

Applications should be written in plain English, as applications may be reviewed by a panel member with expertise in a different area of non-animal technologies to that of the application.

Criteria	EOI Stage	Full Application Stage	Weighing
Research Plan Feasibility	Evaluate the feasibility of the proposed research project, based on a high-level overview of the research plan, including objectives, research question, methodology, study design and data analysis plan.	Evaluating the feasibility of the proposed research project based on a detailed project plan, methodology, risk management, value for money and resource allocation to ensure the project is achievable and well-supported.	50%
Impact and Innovation	Assess the novelty and transformative potential of the proposed research or technology, emphasizing innovation beyond incremental improvements and alignment with NAT-Net mission. Focussed on driving discovery and innovation in use of NATs/complex <i>in vitro</i> models and bringing added value/utility to existing models though use of technology (e.g. Bioengineering, computational, AI, and others).	Detailed evidence supporting novelty, creativity, and potential for breakthrough outcomes, including how the innovation integrates with or advances non-animal technology methods.	25%
Collaboration	Applicants should demonstrate how collaboration enhances the project's reach, relevance, and translational potential within research sectors, aligned with NAT-Net mission.	Evaluate the depth and effectiveness of collaboration, the governance and partnership structures, and the demonstrated or projected impact on health practice, policy, or technology adoption consistent with the NAT-Net mission.	25%

Budget

The budget should be detailed and well-justified and will be assessed as part of the project on:

- overall value for money;
- appropriateness and purpose of each line item;
- existing funding for the research, if any, and how this relates to the additional funding requested without duplication; and
- other contributions and support for the project including from host organisation.

Important Considerations

NAT-Net Mission Statement

NAT-Net aims to accelerate the development and adoption of innovative non-animal technologies in medical research to reduce and ultimately replace the use of animals. By fostering collaboration among leading experts and institutions, the network focuses on creating advanced human cellular models and diverse alternative methods such as computer simulations, synthetic biology, and cell-free models. NAT-Net strives to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of medical research and drug development, improving patient outcomes while supporting regulatory frameworks and infrastructure to advance these cutting-edge technologies in NSW and nationally.

Research Impact Assessment

The NAT-Net mission statement will be used to optimise the probability of research impact at application stage. If the research is funded, the NAT-Net mission statement will guide the measurement of impact throughout the project and at its conclusion.

Note that outcomes and impacts may not be realised during the funded period, and they may be projected to occur in the future. Particularly for basic science, the 'next users' who are responsible for taking the research findings to the next step for translation should be considered from the start of the project so they understand the research and can move the findings towards translation.

Research impact should take into consideration the following:

- **Knowledge Advancement**
 - New interventions, treatments, diagnostics or drug targets.
 - New clinical or medical prototypes.
 - Peer-reviewed publications and presentations at conferences.
 - Media coverage and other non-peer-reviewed publications.
- **Capacity and Capability Building**
 - New partnerships leveraged.
 - Training and professional development.
 - Research students supported.
- **Policy and Practice**
 - Instances where research findings are considered in policy development.
 - Instances of change in clinical practice.
 - Instances of new health technology or new treatments used in clinical care.
- **Health and community**
 - Improved health outcomes, including:
 - change in the time to develop an outcome; and/or
 - change in the likelihood of an outcome occurring.
- **Economic Benefit**
 - Research jobs created and sustained.
 - Patents and commercialisation.
 - Value of leveraged research funding (external grants awarded due to NSW Health funding).
 - Reduction in cost of developing and delivering care.

- Potential for return on investment.

Intellectual Property

To maximise benefits arising from the public funding of research, all recipients of NAT-Net Competitive Grants must comply with the *National Principles of Intellectual Property Management for Publicly Funded Research*¹ as a condition of funding. In addition, intellectual property (IP) arrangements should be agreed between all research partners and organisations. IP arrangements must cover both background IP and IP that is developed during the project. IP arrangements should consider the contributions of all parties. The arrangements should be detailed in the application.

Please refer to NSW Health's Policy Directive *Intellectual Property arising from Health Research* which provides a clear and consistent guide for public health organisations to protect their intellectual property arising from research. NSW Health has also released a *Commercialisation Framework*. Both documents are available [here](https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/intellectual-property-and-commercialisation-framework/) (<https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au/intellectual-property-and-commercialisation-framework/>).

Ethics and Regulation

The host organisation (and where appropriate the administering organisation) must certify that the project has received all appropriate research ethics and regulatory approvals and must ensure these are maintained as required for the duration of the grant. All organisations and personnel contributing to the project must;

- have familiarised themselves with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research², the NHMRC Open Access Policy³, the National Statement of the Ethical Conduct of Human Research⁴, the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes⁵ (including but not limited to the application of the 3Rs 'replacement', 'reduction' and 'refinement' at all stages of animal care and use) or their replacements, and other relevant National Health and Medical Research Council policies concerning the conduct of research and agree to conduct themselves in accordance with those policies;
- comply with any requirements of relevant Commonwealth or State or Territory laws; and,
- comply with any requirements of regulatory bodies that have jurisdiction over the project. This includes, but is not limited to, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator.

Research Collaborations and Partnerships

Applicants are encouraged to identify and engage relevant stakeholders, partners and networks who will provide a meaningful contribution to delivery of the research project and implementation of outcomes.

Partners may include:

¹ Australian Research Council. *National Principles of Intellectual Property Management for Publicly Funding Research*. Jun 2022. Source: <https://www.arc.gov.au/about-arc/program-policies/national-principles-intellectual-property-management-publicly-funded-research>.

² Australian Research Council. *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018*. 2018. Source: <https://www.arc.gov.au/about-arc/program-policies/research-integrity/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018>

³ National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). *NHMRC Open Access Policy*. Jan 2018. Source: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/nhmrc-open-access-policy>.

⁴ NHMRC. *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Oct 2025. Source: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research>.

⁵ NHMRC. *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes*. Jun 2021. Source: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-care-and-use-animals-scientific-purposes>.

- patients, carers and consumer advocacy organisations;
- NSW Health system partners including NSW Ministry of Health, Pillars, statewide health services and [Agency for Clinical Innovation networks](https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/networks) (<https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/networks>);
- local health districts and specialty health networks;
- Advanced Health Research Translation Centres and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health;
- universities and medical research institutes;
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services;
- Primary Healthcare Networks;
- research networks;
- industry;
- consumers and patient; or
- non-government organisations.

Partnerships may vary in type and intensity from informal arrangements such as the provision of occasional advice, to membership of the research team or project steering committee, to formal partnerships that are the subject of a written agreement between the parties.

Where an industry organisation proposes to host a researcher at their site, the following conditions apply and UNSW reserves the right to cancel the funding agreement with the host/administering organisation and recoup funds if they are not met:

- the host/administering organisation must enter into a legally binding agreement with the partnering industry organisation to ensure their obligations are met including the following:
 - accommodate and support the researcher and ensure that the researcher has the support of the industry organisation's Chief Executive Officer or equivalent position;
 - meet all standard employer responsibilities and obligations in accordance with relevant regulations and value gender equity in practice;
 - provide cash and/or in-kind contributions to support the project; and
 - detail intellectual property arrangements in line with the NSW Health Policy and national principles.

Application and Selection Criteria

The application and selection process includes two stages:

- Stage 1: Expression of Interest
- Stage 2: Full Application

All individuals involved in the assessment and decision-making process, including the independent panel of expert reviewers and NAT-Net Executive Committee members, must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest, and will be excluded from the review, discussion, or decision on any application where such a conflict exists, ensuring that all funding decisions are made impartially and transparently in accordance with best practice and NSW Health policy.

Stage 1: Expression of Interest (EOI)

Note: EOIs are limited to a maximum of two for each eligible Host Organisation.

Step 1: Eligibility check

Following the closing date for applications, the NAT-Net Coordinator will determine whether each application has satisfied the eligibility criteria.

Step 2: Review by independent expert panel

An independent panel of expert reviewers will assess each eligible application against the selection criteria and will make recommendations to the NAT-Net Executive Committee.

Step 3: Decision and notification

The NAT-Net Executive Committee will determine which EOIs will progress to full application. Applicants will be notified and provided feedback on their EOI. Successful applicants will be expected to address the feedback in their full application.

Where applicants submit similar proposals, and there may be benefits of working together, the independent panel of expert may recommend a meeting of relevant applicants.

Invitation to full application stage is not a guarantee of funding.

Stage 2: Full Application

Note:

- Full applications only after the application has been shortlisted after the EOI stage.
- During the full application stage, new team members from the same institution as the CIA may be added, but members listed in the EOI cannot be removed without justification.

Step 1: Review by independent expert panel

The independent panel of expert reviewers will assess and score each full application against the selection criteria.

Step 2: Funding recommendation

The independent panel will agree on the final ranking of all eligible applications and will make recommendations for funding to NAT-Net Executive Committee.

Applicants may be required to respond to key questions or concerns in writing within one week to inform the decision on funding the application.

Step 3: Decision and notification

NAT-Net Executive Committee will determine grant recipients and amounts. All applicants will be informed as to whether they have been awarded funding.

Successful applicants may be required to adjust the project based on feedback from the panel and/or NAT-Net Executive Committee.

Step 4: Grant Agreements

UNSW will contact host/administering organisations for successful projects to execute a funding agreement. A standard, non-negotiable funding agreement will be used.

Post award requirements

A schedule for reporting will be outlined in the funding agreement and will include a requirement to provide :

- annual progress reports;
- annual financial reports; and
- a final report, which should include research translation and research impact and financial acquittal following the conclusion of the term of the grant.