

Guidelines for applicants

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2027-2030

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Quick reference guide

Funding available	Approximately NZ\$4,500,000 (excl. GST).
Programme value	\$450,000 (excl. GST) per programme.
Programme length	Programmes must run for three years.
Contract dates	All contracts begin 1 February 2027 and run to - 31 January 2030 .
Applications	Single-stage process: applicants submit a Full Proposal.
Submission	All proposals must be submitted via SmartyGrants
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposals are checked internally for eligibility.• Eligible proposals are assessed by the Expert Assessment Panels which makes recommendations to the Research Advisory Committee.• The Research Advisory Committee reviews the recommendations and advises NHC which proposals should be funded.
Confidentiality	All proposals received will be treated as confidential, subject to Government Convention, and any legal requirements under the Official Information Act 1982, the Privacy Act 2020 or any other relevant law.
Contact us	If you have any questions or there are any changes in your application at any stage, please contact research@naturalhazards.govt.nz as early as possible.

Key dates

Activity	Date
Proposal submission period	31 March until 12 noon on Thursday 21 May 2026
Proposal assessment period	Through end of August 2026
Applicants notified of funding decisions	Expected 21 September 2026
Contracting period	From end of September 2026
Contracts begin	1 February 2027

Dates are subject to change. If they change, we'll let you know by email and update our website. If you are not already in touch with our research team or registered in our Smarty Grants Portal, please email your name, organisation and role to research@naturalhazards.govt.nz with *Research Distribution List* in the subject line.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, Natural Hazards Commission Toka Tū Ake has provided funding to tertiary institutions across Aotearoa New Zealand to build research capability in natural hazard risk reduction.

In 2020, NHC Toka Tū Ake introduced a three year University Research Programme (URP) to support multiyear programme level research. The URP focuses on:

- research that is targeted to NHC Toka Tū Ake's goals and priorities
- contributing to better outcomes for New Zealanders
- developing research capability that is aligned with programme delivery
- collaboration with end users and other stakeholders
- a strong and enduring partnership approach with NHC Toka Tū Ake

Call for Proposals

We are inviting proposals for the University Research Programme 2027 round. The proposal must address or align with our [Resilience Strategy for Natural Hazard Risk Reduction 2024-2029](#), [Research Strategy](#), and [Research Investment Priorities Statement](#), which set out our vision to reduce the impact of natural hazards on people, property and communities.

It is not a requirement that all Research Investment Priorities be covered by the proposed research programme; rather the research programme should focus on the priority or priorities where the applicants consider they have the most expertise and can have the most meaningful impact.

Funding available

The total funding available for the 2027–2030 University Research Programme round is up to \$4.5 million (excluding GST). NHC Toka Tū Ake will fund up to 10 research programmes, each receiving \$150,000 per year for three years (a total of \$450,000 excluding GST per programme).

Funded programmes must be designed to run over the full three-year period, with contracts commencing on 1 February 2027 and concluding on 31 January 2030.

Eligibility criteria

For proposals to be eligible under the University Research Programme round, they must:

- be made by a New Zealand tertiary education provider that offers postgraduate study and has a dedicated research support function - this may include universities, legal entities representing a university, wānanga, or other tertiary providers that meet these criteria
- be designed so that the majority of the benefits in new knowledge accrue outside of the Research Organisation or legal entity which represents the Research Organisation,

- be for research related activities, the majority of which are to be undertaken in New Zealand, unless there are compelling reasons to consider the proposals despite the amount of research related activities being proposed to be undertaken overseas,
- advise that the proposed funding recipient will adhere to the terms and conditions of funding set out in the funding agreement contract
- not be for activities already funded elsewhere,
- clearly explain how the project has the potential to—
 - provide a benefit to insured persons (whether or not the research also has the potential to provide a benefit to persons who are not insured persons); or
 - reduce the future cost of providing natural hazard cover.
- produce research outputs that will be publicly available and able to be used by other researchers, practitioners and the public.
- not exceed \$450,000 excl. GST
- not benefit a Russian state institution (including but not limited to support for Russian military or security activity) or an organisation outside government that may be perceived as contributing to the war effort;

Key documents

When developing your proposal, we encourage you to consult the following key reference documents:

- Our [Funding Guidance](#), which provides general guidance to researchers and research offices about our funding processes from pre-proposal through to contract completion.
- These Guidelines, and the proposal template which are available on our [URP webpage](#).
- Our [Resilience Strategy for Natural Hazard Risk Reduction 2024-2029](#) which sets out our ambition to address New Zealand’s resilience challenges.
- Our [Research Strategy 2024](#) which outlines how we wish to build our evidence base to support smart decision making and lead to innovative ways to reduce impacts from natural hazards.
- Our [Research Investment Priorities Statement 2025](#) which is designed to help applicants align their proposals with our areas of research interest.
- [Template Research Funding Contract](#)
- [Budget Template](#) (under key documents)
- Expert Assessment Panel Scoring Criteria, in Appendix 1 of this document

What is new since the last University Research Programme contestable round?

- We have streamlined the application process by removing the Expression of Interest (EOI) stage. Applicants now submit a single Full Proposal.
- Our assessment process has been updated. Proposals will now be assessed by theme-based Expert Assessment Panels, with an overarching Research Advisory Committee providing strategic moderation.

- Eligibility has been extended. Applications may now be made by all New Zealand tertiary education providers that offer postgraduate programmes and have a dedicated research support function.
- We have updated the URP funding model to allow overheads of up to 30% of staff-related costs, aligning the URP with our other contestable grant schemes.
- We have published our Research Strategy which guides and directs our research activities. We also refreshed our Resilience Strategy for Natural Hazards Risk Reduction.
- We have published a new Research Investment Priorities Statement 2025.
- More generally, we have changed our name and have a new Act, [the Natural Hazards Insurance Act](#).

Application and assessment information

Overall assessment process



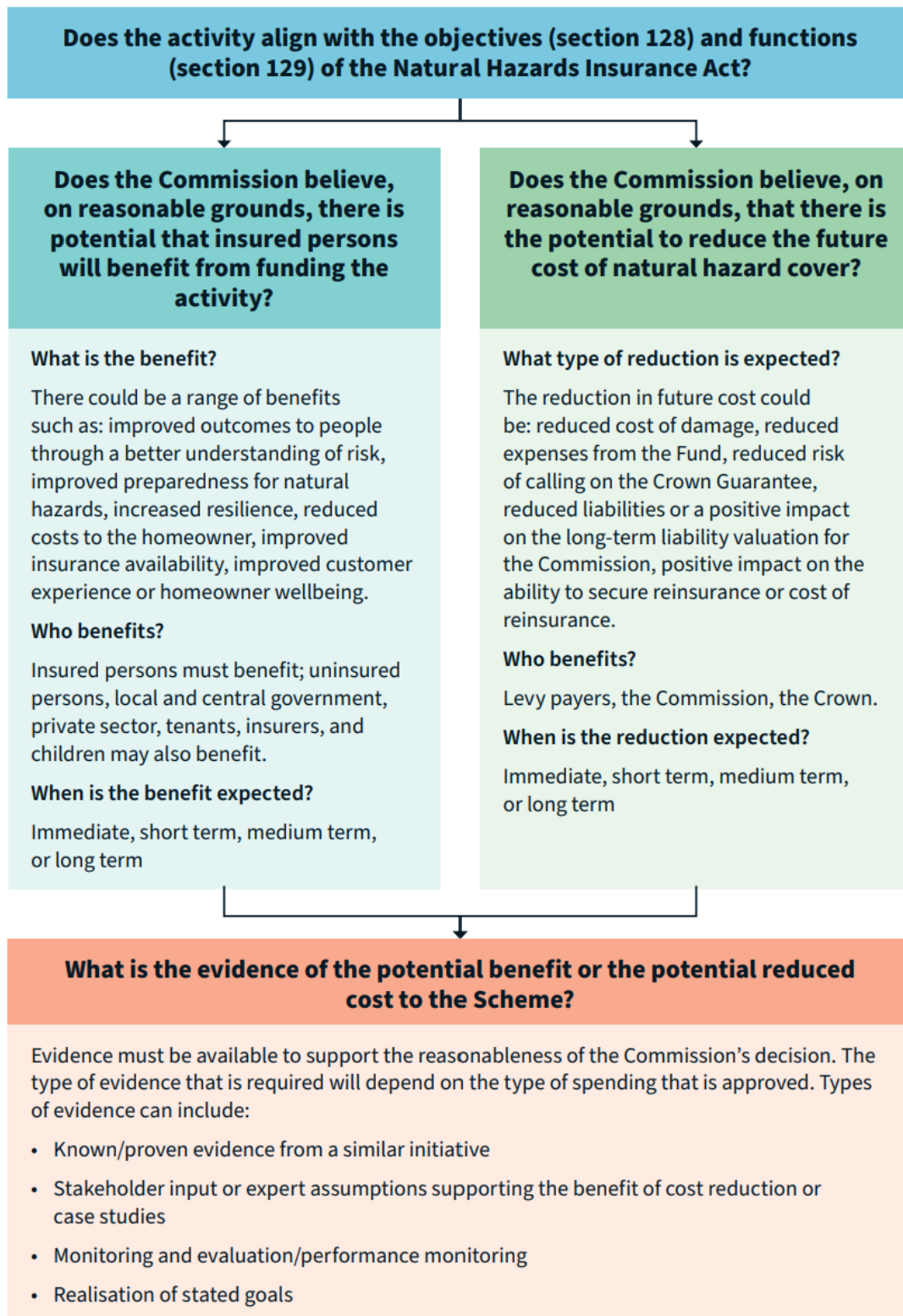
The application and assessment process includes:

1. Applicants submit a proposal.
2. NHC Toka Tū Ake officials assess eligibility and consider benefit test criteria (see below).
3. Expert Assessment Panel members review and score the eligible proposals against the assessment criteria.
4. Expert Assessment Panels meet to moderate scores and agree on recommendations.
5. The Research Advisory Committee reviews the panels' recommendations and applies strategic judgement- considering alignment, balance, and broader system context – to identify which proposals it will advise NHC should be funded.
6. Final funding recommendations are endorsed by the Head of Research and Chief Resilience Officer and submitted to the Chief Executive for approval.

Eligibility assessment

The first step of assessment is assessing the proposal against our eligibility criteria including our legislative requirements for a “resilience ‘benefit test’ criteria” to access the Natural Hazards Fund. Please see flowchart below.

The resilience 'benefit test' criteria



If the proposal is eligible, we will send it to one of the Expert Assessment Panels.

This stage operates on a pass/fail basis; however, if the volume of proposals is excessive, quantification of benefit may be applied to support prioritisation.

Expert Assessment Panels

There will be one Expert Assessment Panel for each research theme. Panels are composed of 4-6 assessors with expertise relevant to the theme areas below (described in more detail in our [Research Strategy](#))

- Quantifying Hazards and Impacts
- Smarter Land Use
- Resilient Buildings
- Supporting People and Decisions

We also endeavour to ensure Rangahau Māori expertise, as well as a variety of academic backgrounds and organisations. We will publish the membership of the Expert Assessment Panels on our [URP webpage](#).

While Expert Assessment Panel members are aligned with the relevant research themes, these themes are broad, and proposals may still cover specialised areas or disciplines. It is therefore important that proposals are clear, succinct, in plain English, and easily understandable.

Where there is not sufficient expertise in the panel to assess the proposals, the panel will recommend that the proposals be reviewed by an external expert from the field/discipline. In this event the researcher will be notified that an additional assessor has been sought.

Assessment Criteria

Assessors will assess your proposal on each of the criteria summarised below. Please find the full scoring criteria in the Appendix. We recommend you review these carefully and keep in mind when developing your proposal.

Research Excellence (50%)

- **High quality** of proposed research (insight through articulation of problem and approach, originality & novelty, and rigour) **(20%)**
- **Clear** research plan with objective(s) and high-level milestones. **Achievable** methodology and outputs. **(10%)**
- **Collaboration** across agencies and/or disciplinary boundaries and clear connections with any existing initiatives. **(10%)**
- **Capability** to deliver research. **(10%)**

Impact (50%)

- **Builds capability** for Aotearoa NZ through the PI and/or the team, increasing knowledge, expertise, and skills of researchers in the natural hazards sector. **(12.5%)**
- **Aligns** with the [Research Strategy](#) and [Research Investment Priorities Statement](#). **(12.5%)**
- Understanding of the **path to uptake** of the research and **line of sight to impact**; strength of **relationships** with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori; consideration of methods for **dissemination** of research findings and/or **engagement** with stakeholders and end-users. **(12.5%)**
- **Benefit** to potential next and end-users, including benefit to insured persons or reducing the future cost of NH cover; **relevance of benefits** and additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks; and where applicable, aligns to the [MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy](#) as it relates to natural hazard resilience. **(12.5%)***

Once proposals have been assessed and moderated, they proceed to the final decision making stage.

* Vision Mātauranga is expected to be a significant and meaningful component of many proposals where it is relevant to the research being undertaken. Where applicable, proposals should demonstrate how Vision Mātauranga has been appropriately considered.

Research Advisory Committee

The Research Advisory Committee includes senior NHC representatives and external experts who bring strategic, sector, and system-level perspectives. Membership will be published on our URP webpage.

Funding decisions

In making investment decisions, the Research Advisory Committee will:

- consider Expert Assessment Panel scoring, commentary, and moderated recommendations
- consider portfolio balancing, investment signals and targets in our Research Strategy.

The committee may recommend investing less in total than the round indicated.

Applicants should note that the recommendations of the panel, the committee and NHC are final, and action taken to engage with individual panel members regarding scoring and moderation matters will not be tolerated.

Conflicts of interest

We will publish the membership of the Expert Assessment Panels and Research Advisory Committee on our [URP webpage](#). If you identify that a Panel Member or Committee Member has

an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest, declare this in the Conflicts of Interest section of your proposal. If you discover a potential conflict of interest after proposal submission, notify us immediately by emailing research@naturalhazards.govt.nz with details of the conflict.

Panel Member and Committee Members will operate under a confidentiality agreement. This includes a declaration and management of any conflicts of interest.

Where an external expert is sought to review a proposal, they will also be bound by a confidentiality agreement.

A **direct conflict of interest** is where you identify:

- An assessor is directly involved with a proposal (as a participant, manager, mentor, or partner) or has a close personal relationship with the applicant, for example, family members, and/or
- An assessor is involved as collaborator or in some other way involved with your proposal.

An **indirect conflict of interest** is where you identify a Panel Member or Committee Member:

- is employed by an organisation involved in a proposal but is not part of your proposal
- has a personal and/or professional relationship with you or your team, and/or
- is assessing a proposal under discussion that may compete with their personal or business interests.

Should you identify a conflict, it must be declared and explained, including what kind of conflict (see above), and the circumstances from which the conflict arises. Perceived, potential, and actual conflicts should be explained.

If a conflict is declared, NHC will decide a management plan. The plan may include the conflicted assessor not scoring the proposal and exiting the moderation meeting when it is discussed, as appropriate.

Feedback

All proposal applicants will be given feedback at the conclusion of the round. Information will be given in good faith to improve future applications for funding.

How to submit your application

Completing and submitting proposals

Applicants are required to complete their registration and submit proposals in [SmartyGrants](#), our Grant Management System - a secure online portal. To help you prepare your registration and proposals we have provided two templates:

- [URP Proposal template](#) (under key documents)
- [NHC Toka Tū Ake research Budget Template](#) (under key documents)

These templates are linked in the key documents section above and are also available on our website.

All applicants are required to submit their proposals via our online [SmartyGrants](#) research grants management system. You can use your existing account or create a new one. When the round opens, the application form will be made available online. Login to SmartyGrants or create a new account by [clicking here](#).



For more information on how to create an account or navigate using [SmartyGrants](#) please visit [SmartyGrants Help Guide for Applicants](#).

SmartyFile

Tertiary Education Providers and University Research Offices, as well as Administrators from other organisations applying for URP grants, can now administer, view, manage and submit multiple applications via SmartyFile. To do so, you must first [create an account on SmartyFile](#).

For more information on how to create an account or navigate using SmartyFile, please visit [SmartyFile Help Guide for Applicants](#).



Contracting, payment, reporting and monitoring

Contracting

If we decide to invest in your proposal, we will enter into a Research Funding Agreement with your organisation. Our research funding agreement template is available on our website. If your proposal receives funding from us, the terms and conditions in the Research Funding Agreement will apply. We encourage all applicants to seek legal advice to ensure they agree with the terms and conditions we set out.

We may:

- Set pre-contract conditions that must be met before we and the applicant organisation enter into a Research Funding Agreement.
- Set special contract conditions.
- In special cases, vary the amount of funding allocated from that requested.

Payments

The total funding over the term of the contract will be split into payments throughout the life of the project. There will be an upfront payment upon agreement signing, and payments throughout the project, with at least 10% withheld until final delivery.

Reporting and monitoring

Successful applicants will be required to report through **SmartyGrants** for the duration of the programme. Reporting includes **six monthly progress reports**, **annual reports**, and a **final report** at the conclusion of the three year programme. These reports provide updates on progress against milestones, research outputs, capability development, stakeholder engagement, benefits, and any issues that may affect delivery.

In addition to written reporting, NHC Toka Tū Ake will meet with the research team once a year to check in on progress and stay connected with the programme. These meetings help ensure the programme is well supported and progressing as intended.

Public engagement and communications

Programme holders are required from time to time to collaborate with NHC Toka Tū Ake on communication/stakeholder engagement activities and social media posts.

Contact

If you have any questions, please contact us at research@naturalhazards.govt.nz

Appendix 1: Expert Assessment Panel Scoring Criteria

Proposals scoring grid							
Scores and criteria:	1 None Not /no Negligible Missing Not credible	2 Minimal Poor Little Inadequate Insufficient Doubtful Lacking	3 Some Uncertain Partial Incomplete Limited Lacks detail Possibly	4 Acceptable Sufficient Suitable Adequate Reasonably Enough	5 Good Well Clear Large Decent	6 Strong High Comprehensive Very good Very well Certain Extensive	7 High Quality Excellent Exemplary Impressive Outstanding Definitely
Research Excellence (50%)							
High quality of proposed research (insight through articulation of problem and approach, originality & novelty, and rigour). (20%)	This proposal does not articulate the problem with an approach that is not fit for purpose . Negligible originality and novelty. No rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem poorly with a doubtful approach of how to solve it. Minimal originality and novelty. Insufficient rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem partially with an uncertain approach of how to solve it. Some originality and novelty. Some rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem reasonably well with a sufficient approach of how to solve it. Acceptable originality and novelty. Suitable rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem well with a clear approach of how to solve it. Good originality and novelty. Clear rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem very well with a certain approach of how to solve it. Strong originality and novelty. Very good rigour in approach.	This proposal articulates the problem excellently with an outstanding approach of how to solve it. Outstanding originality and novelty. Excellent rigour to approach.
Clear research plan with objective(s) and high-level milestones. Achievable methodology and outputs. (10%)	Proposal has unrealistic or no objectives, and the project plan is missing . The methodology is not credible , and there are no clear outputs.	Proposal has inadequate objectives, and the project plan is lacking . The methodology is poor , and it is lacking outputs.	Proposal has some objectives, and the project plan is uncertain . The methodology is incomplete , and there are some outputs.	Proposal has suitable objectives, and an adequate project plan. The methodology is reasonable , and there are suitable outputs.	Proposal has good objectives, and a clear project plan. The methodology is clear , and there are decent outputs.	Proposal has comprehensive objectives, and a good project plan. The methodology is very good , and there are extensive outputs.	Proposal has excellent objectives, and a high quality project plan. The methodology is exemplary , and there are high quality outputs.
Collaboration across agencies and/or disciplinary boundaries and clear connections with any existing initiatives. (10%)	This research has no collaboration and does not complement, align, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has minimal collaboration and poorly complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has limited collaboration and partially complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has sufficient collaboration and reasonably complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has significant collaboration and largely complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has strong collaboration and extensively complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.	This research has excellent collaboration and definitely complements, aligns, or fill gaps of other research programmes.
Capability to deliver research (10%)	Those involved do not have the skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have inadequate skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have limited skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have sufficient skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have good skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have strong skills and background to deliver the research.	Those involved have excellent skills and background to deliver the research.

Impact (50%)							
<p>Capability Building (12.5%)</p> <p>Builds capability for Aotearoa NZ through the PI and/or the team, increasing knowledge, expertise, and skills of researchers in the natural hazards sector.</p>	No capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Minimal capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Some capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Sufficient capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Good capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Strong capability building for the researcher, team, or sector	Outstanding capability building for the researcher, team, or sector
<p>Alignment (12.5%)</p> <p>Aligns with the Research Investment Priorities Statement 2025 and the Research Strategy.</p>	The research has no alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has minimal alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has limited alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has acceptable alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has good alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has strong alignment to the strategy or any research priorities	The research has excellent alignment to the strategy or any research priorities
<p>Uptake (12.5%)</p> <p>Understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Consideration of methods for dissemination of research findings and/or engagement with stakeholders and end-users.</p>	<p>No understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Missing strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders has not been considered</p>	<p>Lacking understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Poor strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Inadequate methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Some understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Limited strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Incomplete methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Reasonable understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Sufficient strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Adequate methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Clear understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Substantial strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Good methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Very good understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Strong strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>Comprehensive methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>Outstanding understanding of the path to uptake of the research and line of sight to impact.</p> <p>Exemplary strength of relationships with relevant users and beneficiaries of the research, including Māori.</p> <p>High quality methods for dissemination and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.</p>
<p>Benefit (12.5%)</p> <p>Benefit to potential next and end-users, including benefit to insured persons or reducing the future cost of NH cover.</p> <p>Relevance of benefits and additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks. Where applicable, aligns to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Negligible scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>The relevance of benefits and additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks is missing.</p> <p>When you would otherwise expect it, there is no alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Minimal scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover</p> <p>Poor relevance of benefits and insufficient additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>When you would otherwise expect it, there is only minimal alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Limited scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>Some relevance of benefits and partial additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>When you would otherwise expect it, there is only partial alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Acceptable scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>Sufficient relevance of benefits and reasonable additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>If applicable, there is reasonable alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Substantial scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>Good relevance of benefits and large additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>If applicable, there is Good alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Extensive scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>Comprehensive relevance of benefits and certain additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>If applicable, there is Very good alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>	<p>Impressive scale and extent of potential benefit to insured persons and/or potential for the research to reduce costs of providing natural hazards insurance cover.</p> <p>Outstanding relevance of benefits and exemplary additional value for Māori and for all New Zealanders' resilience to natural hazard risks.</p> <p>If applicable, there is Excellent alignment to the MBIE Vision Mātauranga Policy as it relates to natural hazard resilience.</p>