

Not as Frequently Asked Questions

More specific questions asked during Marsden 2025 Q&A Webinars

Impacts and benefits

Q: Is it expected to not only outline the benefits of the research, but also explain how these **benefits will be achieved** throughout the project?

A: If the benefits are short-term and are expected to arise during the course of the project, they can be outlined. However if they are medium to long-term, how they will be achieved is not expected.

Q: What is the most relevant way to answer why the **research should be carried out in Aotearoa New Zealand**?

A: What is it about the team within Aotearoa New Zealand or what are the unique benefits to Aotearoa New Zealand for your project? What are the advantages of doing this research in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Q: Would the economic **benefit statement** need to come up with **actual \$\$ numbers**?

A: No, you do not need to come up with dollar figure numbers for this section.

Q: Would **cost savings** would be an **economic benefit**? Or is the focus more on creation and commercialisation pathways?

A: Direct contributions to economic growth meet the new Terms of Reference more closely than cost savings do. The exact circumstances may make a difference, so present the best case for your project. The driver for showing economic benefits is creating commercialisation pathways and growth, rather than cost savings. However, if your research has long-term cost saving benefits then that is also positive. Don't try and write something as a commercialisation pathway if it isn't there.

Q: My research question is original, novel and is supported by some preliminary results. But I am unsure if it has direct positive economic benefit to Aotearoa New Zealand [i.e., there is **scholarly impact** but possibly **no economic impact**].

A: If you don't know whether it's going to have a direct benefit – remember – it is calling for the *potential* for benefits. Consider the possible benefits.

Q: Would **health savings**, i.e. Preventative care, come under **both economic and health benefits**?

A: The direct economic gain is probably going to be a stronger argument than making savings. Of course, you could argue that if you look after wellbeing, you're going to keep people out of hospitals. So that would create savings as well. I think it's up to people to make the best case they can for the potential impact or impacts that they're going to address.

Health savings that may lead to medium- or long-term benefit for the country or potential economic benefit could allow a person to tick economic and health.

Q: What duration should applicants assume for **long-term benefits**?

A: Long term is more around *how* is it going to have impact. For example, if you're working on a specific algorithm but it's not going to have impact right away, and it could be picked up later on and worked on by somebody else, it could have impact later on. It's not necessarily that it's a specific duration. It's asking how far from impact it is. This also depends on discipline/panel.

Q: Will the requirement for **direct economic gains** be as strict for Fast Start applicants as Standard applicants?

A: It will be judged similarly across Fast Start and Standard proposals. Remember there are still health, environment and economic benefits to address, too. There is a requirement to show a benefit in one or more of those three areas. And there is a requirement for the fund as a whole that 50% of the funding goes towards proposals that have the potential for economic be

Q: Could **environmental benefits** to Aotearoa New Zealand also include the Ross Dependency of **Antarctica**, seeing as Aotearoa New Zealand has the right of sovereignty over this area?

A: If you were to include this in the benefits section, the panel would be likely to consider such a rationale. The way you demonstrate to the panel how it is a benefit to Aotearoa New Zealand will be important.

Q: Our fundamental research project is carried out in **Antarctica**, with **no direct economic or environmental impact** for Aotearoa New Zealand. Would Marsden support this type of research?

A: The Marsden Fund supports research with *potential* (not direct) economic, environmental, or health impacts. These are key elements to each proposal. It is up to you to decide whether or not the research question(s) you're putting forward can relate to any of these areas of proposed benefit, as well as what the rationale is for Aotearoa New Zealanders.

Q: When evaluating research proposals, how might panels balance the priorities of fundamental, basic science with long-term economic or technological benefits versus applied research with immediate or short-term benefits? What key **factors influence the decision-making [re impacts]** processes in each case?

A: Firstly, the Fund looks at scholarly impact and excellence. Is it going to advance the discipline? Next, does it have potential for impact? This is more likely long-term impact, but it does not exclude the possibility that impact could come quickly.

Q: I guess some **quantifiable impacts** are **publications** arising from the work?

A: Yes. For example, how might you contribute to your field in areas of theory, methodology etc.

Q: For the Marsden Fund Council Award: What is the **difference between Section 3F** (Assessment Criteria) and **Section 3I** (Benefit Statement)?

A: The 3I Benefit Statement section is where the economic/environmental/health benefits should be addressed. The Assessment Criteria section is for conveying the more general benefits of your research. There may be some overlap in these sections.

Q: How do you write about **quantifiable impact in the abstract**?

A: Part of quantifiable impact could be considered as the potential to lead to economic/environmental/health outcomes *beyond contributions to knowledge*. In other words, not scholarly impact.

Q: Since the **abstract template** requests to describe the **quantifiable impact**, is it expected to mention briefly the **benefits** here and expand in this corresponding benefits section (3D)?

A: There is an expectation to briefly mention the potential benefits here and expand on it in 3D – the Benefit Section. In the abstract, you are wanting to highlight your research and give the panel some ideas about what your potential benefits are. There is another section in 3D where you can elaborate and include references if you wish.

Q: Could **images** be added to the **Benefit section**?

A: No. That's a text only web entry box. There is no space in the Benefits section or no way to add an image.

Q: Could I **omit references** if something I am referring to is extremely obvious?

A: If things are generally accepted then not everything needs to be referenced, however what you may find obvious may not be obvious to everyone else. Personal judgement or advice from others may help.

Q: Are other **references** included in the 400-word limit for the Benefit/Impact section?

Yes.

Q: Instead of including full **references** in the online box, can we include them in the References section 3B, and then number them in the Benefits and VM sections?

A: Please put them in the benefit / impact section. This is a web entry text box, so it might be a bit complicated if panellists are having to scan backwards and forwards to different parts of that document. When it comes to references in different sections, please put them where they're relevant (e.g., VM references in VM section, Impact references in benefit / Impacts section, etc.).

Vision Mātauranga (VM)

Q: If the current application of the research doesn't justify a **VM** statement, but in the future will lead to work that would typically include a VM statement, should we still fill out the VM statement section with this rationale or should it just be included in the EOI?

A: Every applicant has up to 200 words to explain how or why their project does or does not align to the theme(s) of VM. It would be good to put this situation with future work into that explanation. Be sure to be clear that it is not applicable – and why, yet in the future, it could be. Be sure it is clear for the panellists.

Q: If our project has a **VM** component, do we need to list our **VM partners** as AIs or collaborators?

A: This will depend on their contribution to the research. If they are advising, then they may be part of an advisory committee or potentially collaborators. If they are going to be contributing to the research itself, then they should be AIs. Knowledge should be recognised appropriately as intellectual or occupational input and resourced appropriately. So this is a question to have with your partners in the first instance.

Writing EOI abstracts

Q: How detailed do the **methods** need to be in the EOI? Currently, I only have space for one to two sentences about methods for each of my three aims.

A: That may well be enough if it's got a citation or reference next to it, which can help the panellists. Look to the criteria and make sure that you're addressing each of the criteria. You need enough background that the panellists will understand the context of your research. You don't want a half a page of background, you've got one page, use it wisely.

Q: Can I include **scientific reports for clients** in my reference section? Ones that are **not necessarily accessible to the public**.

A: If they're going to help explain the research or the impact of the research then it may be worth including them.

Think about the assessment criteria, think about how the panellists are going to holistically grade those criteria and how evidence that you give in the EOI can be used for the criterion around ability and capacity.

One place to include scientific reports for clients is in your CV, to demonstrate outcomes you have as part of your work. There is a section in the standard CV called 'Other Forms of Dissemination', which includes technical reports. You can also describe them in the narrative CV.

Q: Even if our results do **not directly impact on economic growth**, but they can be leveraged for a similar purpose, can we tick the economic growth box?

The importance is to highlight *potential* economic growth in the medium to long-term. This is about investigator-led science. The expectation is not for impact tomorrow. If there is capacity for subsequent impact, you can tick the economic growth box.

Team composition

Q: Is there a **minimum number of people** required for a team?

A: The minimum number of people on your team is one (i.e., Principal Investigator).

Q: Is there a **limit for the number of PIs and AIs** in a **standard** application?

A: There is no hard limit, but you will come up against logistical and budgetary issues quite quickly. You need to consider – will this team deliver the work package as described? If it is a large team, how will it be managed? Try to have a clear line of sight between the project goals and the team members assembled. What does each member bring to the team and how will their skills combine to complete it successfully?

Q: When applying for a Fast Start, is it necessary to include an **AI in my application**?

A: No, you don't need to have an AI if you have all the skills that you need to carry out your research. You will need to look at what skills are required. Do you have all of those? If you don't, then you will need somebody to help you.

Q: What would be a **suitable AI** for a Postdoc Fast Start applicant? What career level can they be?

A: If you are a Postdoc (depending on how far post PhD you are) it is sometimes good to have a senior person, either as an AI or as a mentor. You can only afford to put so many people into your budget with the amount of money you have. You have to bring the right team together for your project so that your project is feasible and can be done. You could have a PhD student, but they are probably unlikely to be an AI. They are more likely to be included in the "Postgraduate" category.

An AI can be a Postdoc or PhD student at any career stage, although they are probably a little less common in a Fast Start. You may be an early career researcher and your AI may also be an ECR. If you're thinking, "do they have to be a professor?" The answer is not at all.

Q: What is the requirement for having an **overseas AI**?

A: There is no requirement to have an overseas AI. You need to look at what you want to do with your research. Do you have all the skills to achieve that? If you don't, then you will need people to be AIs (or others) to help you. Whether they are from Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas, this does not matter, as long as their roles are clearly defined, and they are going to contribute to your research.

Q: Can I list an **International Collaborator as an AI**?

A: Yes. They would need to submit a CV, like an Aotearoa New Zealand-based AI. They cannot receive a paid salary from a Marsden budget. The conditions for application are the same as a NZ-based AI in terms of logging on, accepting to be on the proposal, etc. It is important that they are credible – so don't add people to simply add their name or fame to your proposal. What will they add to your project?

Q: My **AI** has gone overseas and their **CV** and will be unavailable until after the portal closes. Does this mean I need to remove them from my proposal?

A: They can't be an AI if you don't have a CV for them. You could name them as a collaborator in the Roles and Resources section, but they won't have a formal role in the project. You may be able to find someone who does have their CV available and is willing to be on the proposal.

FTEs and budget

Q: Does the **Fast Start** grant cover university **overheads**? For me, it's 120% of my salary.

A: Yes, it does. Marsden has a full cost funding requirement so have a talk to your Research Office (if you're in a larger organisation) about putting a budget together because the overheads will constrain the FTE that you'll be able to commit to your research.

Q: What is **the minimum FTE for a PI**?

A: For Fast Starts it is 0.2 FTE, for Standard grants the combined PI FTE time is 0.1 FTE.

Q: Is there a minimum **FTE per AI**?

A: Yes, it's 0.05 FTE for each year that they are involved in the project.

Q: Could I have an **AI at 0.05 for one year** only? Or is it 0.05 average per year?

A: Yes, it can be just for one year.

Q: Do **Als** have to be funded at least **0.05 FTE in the Marsden budget**? I have a collaborator who is instrumental but has a permanent salary, so we don't need to fund them.

A: Yes – this is a minimum FTE requirement for AIs. The Fund has a full cost-funding requirement under its Terms of Reference, which means for NZ-based researchers on permanent salaries, their Marsden FTE releases some of their salary to be used elsewhere. You pay for their time and their overhead, and you also may be needing to provide some contribution in the research expenses that they will undertake as part of your project.

Q: The minimum time for an **AI is 0.05 FTE per year**. Considering the three-year project time, is it okay to include one AI for **one year** of the project with 0.05 FTE, but without any FTE?

A: AIs may be assigned FTE at a minimum of 0.05 for a single or several years, depending on the nature and schedule of their contribution. If an AI is funded only for certain years, please explain the rationale in the Roles and Resources Section. Overseas AIs must cover any FTE through their own funding. If, for example, they will work on the first objective/aim/hypothesis/discovery component and this will be done in one year, that is fine.

Q: There are guidelines around the minimum FTE for PIs and AIs in the guidelines, but is there a **maximum on FTE** for these roles?

A: There isn't a maximum because people will have different salaries. The budget will set it for you – this depends on your project. Within the Fast Start cap, if PIs don't have any AIs, they may be able to increase their FTE slightly. If they have an AI, they will need to have a smaller one. Some projects may lend themselves to low direct costs, which in turn could allow a researcher a greater FTE.

Q: Can we provide **travel funding for international AIs**?

A: If it is still within the budget cap of your Fast Start, yes, you can.

Q: Can or should a **subcontractor** be named as an **AI**? I have an AI who's no longer at my host organisation, how do I manage that?

A: Please name them on as Associate Investigator. For the budget at the Full round application, they will also become a Subcontractor. There is a section to explain they are not at your organisation and that you need to pay them externally. Name them AI first and then subcontract them in the budget later.

Q: We plan to include an **External Collaborator** who will provide **in-kind support** with our **budget** allocation. How should their contributions be documented? Is it appropriate to assign them zero FTE and detail their roles and responsibilities accordingly?

(Here we assume collaborator means an AI).

You will write about this person in the Roles and Resources so the panel can understand their roles and responsibilities.

At the EOI round, their FTE should be listed in the personnel table, but there is no budget so you will not have to document this.

At the Full round, if the person is located overseas, list their FTE in the personnel table as for the EOI round, but include them in the budget with an FTE of zero, as international collaborators cannot receive a paid salary from a Marsden budget. You may not be able to pay their time but you may for example, be able to pay some direct costs for the research that they may be undertaking on your behalf.

Note: If they are based in Aotearoa New Zealand, they do need to be accounted for and in your budgeting, their FTE does need to be paid for. If they are outside your research organization, they will need to be subcontracted.

Q: Is there a limit on the **overheads** funds? I'm applying for a FastStart and based in a CRI.

A: There is a fully costed system in place. Normally there is an overhead rate somewhere between 100 to 120%. Research organisations like CRIs and some of the smaller research organisations or independent research organisations can sometimes have lower overhead funding rates.

Q: If researchers are listed as **AIs** and the proposal passes the EOI round should their **salary** be included in the total budget?

A: If they are Aotearoa New Zealand-based, yes. If they are overseas, then Marsden cannot pay salary for overseas Investigators.

Q: How is **salary for future years** calculated when pay increases are not finalised yet?

A: This is a conversation to have with your Research Office. Most large organisations will have salary increases factored into their budget planning.

Mentors (Fast Start only)

Q: Can you have a **mentor** that will soon be an emeritus professor?

A: Yes, you can.

Q: Can you have more than one **mentor**? I would like to include someone external, but I take the point that an internal mentor would be useful too.

A: You can only have one mentor listed officially. If you have another mentor in mind you could mention them in the Roles and Resources section. Choose which one you want to have as your official mentor.

Q: My **mentor** is highly experienced and works with the same methodology as myself and is also my supervisor for my PhD. He's at a different university with several grants under his belt. Is this a good choice or not?

A: If this person is the best person to give you that advice it is fine to name them as the mentor. They should be giving advice in the project management area and not in the methodology of the research. If they are going to be inputting into your research methods or interpreting the results that come out of that then they're probably more of an AI. AIs can act as mentors and can actually provide both services by helping guide you through parts of your project.

Q: Section 1D does not allow me to change my **mentor**. Is this a **portal issue** or am I doing something incorrect?

A: This person was asked to submit their question to the Marsden Fund by email

Roles and Resources

Q: I'm just wondering about **capability building for FS and Standard** proposals?

A: Standard proposals should describe what capability will be built from the project. Fast-Start applicants don't need to demonstrate that in the proposals because we are developing capability through funding you. This is specifically about how you describe how this project would build your independent career.

Q: Do you recommend a **paragraph in the abstract listing the strengths of the team**, identifying team members by their initials?

A: Not necessarily. Most often, commentary of this type is found in the Roles and Resources section.

Q: Should we include **budget information or resource needs** in the **Roles and Resources** section?

A: You don't need to include specific budget information at the EOI round. You do need to say what your resource needs are. If you need a particular piece of equipment or access to particular samples or field sites, this is where you detail this information, but you don't have to put a number value until the full round.

Q: Do you have any advice about **career development** and the **Roles and Resources** section? What are the panels looking for at the **Fast Start** level specifically? Does it pay to provide specific detail (for example, names of conferences to be attended)?

A: A good idea can be to frame your independence first in the Roles and Resources section. Show how you're starting out your research career and how that might develop. This may not need to go down to the detail of conferences. Why you? Why now? What's great about the work that you're going to do and how are you well positioned to do that? Who's going to help you get through that? (NB – this can differ across panels, for example, in computer science conferences can be a good indication of career development).

CVs

Q: In the **standard CV**, where should we include conference presentations, lecturing and supervision?

A: There is a section called 'Other Forms of Dissemination' which could include conference presentations. Lecturing and supervisions could be added to one of the narrative type questions. Feel free to include anything you deem relevant there.

Process, Guidelines, and Panels

Q: Do **technical staff** need **CVs** within the application?

A: No, CVs are required for named Investigators only.

Q: Could you explain in more detail the **differences between the convenor and the panel members**?

A: Each panel is led by a convenor who is appointed by the Minister of the day. The convenor works with the Marsden Fund team at Te Apārangi to appoint experts to their panel. During meetings, the convenor and the panellists work together to decide which applications are worthy of taking to the next round or through to funding. Each convenor also serves on the Marsden Fund Council, which comes together several times a year to ratify decisions and carry out many other functions.

Q: There are still some empty roles in the **panels**. Do we have an ETA for when the full panel members will be listed?

A: The Marsden Fund team have been trying very hard to complete the panels. We hope to have everything completed as soon as possible. Ideally, we want to have everyone in place by the EOI deadline.

Q: Can you offer advice on how to **select a panel** to submit your research to if it sits between **two different panels**? For example, my background and my research project aligns with PCB, but some of the project and the broader rationale and impacts align strongly with BMS.

A: You will want to select the panel that reflects your strongest science. The research excellence is a hallmark of the Marsden Fund. You will want to foreground the science first and foremost, including what is new or novel about your work. You could also consider the kind of journals you would be publishing your research in, and what fields do those journals fall into. Also, look at who is on the panel to see if your research aligns with some of the panellists. We expect potential benefits and impacts to be easily grasped by all panel members irrespective of their research background.

Q: Some of the **panels** do not encompass all areas of **health**. Which panel would be the best fit for applications focused on behavioural health research? Are there any specific considerations for interdisciplinary projects in this area?

A: It is not possible to assemble a panel of experts to cover all areas of health or all areas of any domain or discipline. You should remember that you are writing specifically for the panel at the EOI stage – the panel is the target audience for your proposal.

The larger Marsden Fund Council Award grant category also exists and is specifically for interdisciplinary projects.

Q: How many **panellists** are selected to assess one EOI? How do you deal with the fact that the panellists might not be experts in a specific field of research?

A: The number of panellists assessing an EOI will depend on the panel you apply to. The number of panellists can vary from eight to nine people per panel. Usually, panellists will assess all proposals they are not conflicted on. Conflicts of interest can affect the number of panellists assessing an EOI. Five is the minimum for comfort levels. It is not possible to assemble a panel of experts to cover all areas of research, but we work hard to ensure a broad and deep knowledge base across the panels.

Q: How are **conflicts of interest** managed in the panel for example assessing proposals from the same group or organisation?

A: This is described in full in the [panellist guidelines](#).

Q: Do you have a **timeline for when the full proposal** guidelines and application template will be released following the EOI stage?

A: Full proposal guidelines are usually available when the portal opens for the full round. Templates will be available when the full proposal portal opens in May.

Assessment, scoring, and feedback

Q: How is **feasibility** of the proposed research assessed? I have received different feedback from different people who have looked at my proposal.

A: Feasibility is about viability and rigour. Ask yourself if the project is achievable in three years and consider if the project has good, robust methodology. If you are a Fast Start applicant, you may want to ask your mentor's opinion as well. Keep in mind that having the right team to help you deliver the research objectives is very important.

Q: At the full proposal stage, are we provided with any **feedback from the panellists** and the reviewers?

A: You will receive feedback from the reviewers on your proposal via the referee reports. If unsuccessful, you can seek panel feedback from the panel convenor.

Q: Do applicants receive **feedback** on unsuccessful EOI applications?

A: Because of limited resources, the only way to get panel feedback from the convenor is if you are an unsuccessful Fast-Start applicant ranked in the 2nd or 3rd quintile.

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Q: My **unsuccessful proposal** was **eligible to receive feedback** last year, but I could not contact the convener then. Can I receive feedback for my unsuccessful proposal from last year?

A: This person was asked to submit their question to the Marsden Fund by email

Formatting

Q: Could I **remove the titles of pages**, for example, 3A) abstract and 3C) benefit statement as well as the instructions?

A: It is important to retain the titles, but you may remove the instructions below them. The benefit section is a web entry box, so the title is automatically generated and cannot be removed.

Please do not remove page titles – the panellists will struggle to work out which section is which.

Q: Would it constitute a breach of the EOI formatting guidelines if the description of the proposed research **expands significantly from the abstract or other sections**?

A: Yes, each section should be used for its purpose. Please refer to the [guidelines](#).

Eligibility

Q: My **contract with my employer is ending** soon. Would I not be able to apply for Marsden under the **Standard** proposal category?

A: Any PI on a proposal must show that they have the support of a host organisation and access to all necessary resources. Regardless of your employment status, if you can get support from your host organisation, you can apply.

Q: How is **independent research** defined for a Fast Start applicant? I am developing my own project under a larger research project. Am I **eligible**?

A: You can still be part of a larger group but have a distinct project that you are leading. Please mark out where this Marsden project differs from the wider work and why it needs to be led by you. In your application, it is important to demonstrate your independence in the Roles and Resources section. Demonstrate to the panel how this project is going to develop your career as an independent researcher and demonstrate your independence from your supervisor. It is important for the panel to see your leadership and that you are not just part of the mechanism for a much larger project.

Q: The EOI guidelines for **eligibility** state **recent graduates** must have completed all requirements for conferment of their PhD by the EOI closing date in February. What does this **include**?

A: You would need the letter from your university confirming that everything is in order for the degree to be conferred / you have fulfilled all the requirements for the PhD degree. You do not need to have graduated.

Other

Q: How is Marsden **different to the MBIE Smart Ideas scheme**?

A: The Marsden Fund will maintain its focus on science excellence and investigator-led research. Approximately, 50% of the Fund will go to support proposals that demonstrate potential for economic benefits.

Q: The grant size right now is not enough to support larger research teams. Are you considering any future **increases to the grants**?

A: This is reviewed each year. There is a limited amount of money in the Marsden Fund and if the size of the grants increases, inevitably the success rate of funded proposals decreases.

Q: Can the Minister of the time **veto** the proposals that were recommended for funding by the Marsden panels?

A: As per the [Terms of Reference](#), the Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology does not have a decision-making part of the disbursement of funds. That is delegated under authority to the Marsden Fund Council, who makes those decisions about what should be funded.

Q: Could you please explain **the difference between strategic basic and applied research**?

A: These definitions are available on the application portal in the “type of research” section.

“Strategic basic research is experimental and theoretical work undertaken to acquire new knowledge directed into specified broad areas in the expectation of practical discoveries. It provides the broad base of knowledge necessary for the solution of recognised practical problems.”

“Applied research is original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific, practical aim or objective.”

Q: Could Marsden be used to investigate the **fundamental aspects of an applied research project** that has been funded elsewhere?

A: Yes. Research excellence and potential benefits are the important factors regardless of the type of research.

Q: Will it count against you if you have **changed research directions** in your career?

A: No, not necessarily. The narrative CV could be utilised to outline how your career has shifted/developed to date. It could help you demonstrate that you are the right person for this type of research.

Q: How should I balance **risk**? Can I de-risk my idea later in the funding round?

A: High risk proposals are not necessarily bad. This risk should be balanced with clear rationale, the correct team, potential fall-back plans, etc. If you think your EOI is risky, you can use the extra space in the full round proposal to explain the risk factors and mitigating plans more clearly.