

How we judge your application.

Applications are scored against four criteria:

1. Scientific quality
2. Benefit to people living with CHS conditions (or wider population)
3. Benefit to NICHS (the charity)
4. Value for money

Criterion 3: Benefit to NICHS (the Charity)

Key question:

Is this a responsible and worthwhile use of charitable funding, and does the study clearly support NICHS's mission and priorities?

What to consider

- alignment with NICHS strategy
- relevance to Northern Ireland
- public/donor value
- reputational considerations

What your application should show

Your application should explain:

- how the study is relevant to chest, heart and stroke conditions, or their prevention.
- how it could benefit people and communities in Northern Ireland
- why NICHS is an appropriate funder for this work
- how the study connects to one or more relevant NICHS priorities, where that connection is genuine
- what the study will deliver now, and what it might lead to next.

Proportionality

- We assess this criterion in proportion to the size and stage of the study.
- A strong application does not need to promise immediate service change, policy influence or public profile. Early-stage, exploratory or focused studies can still score highly if they make a clear case for why the work matters, why NICHS should fund it, and how it could lead to useful learning, better evidence, stronger services or future impact.



You do not need to show that your study matches every part of the strategy. What matters is a clear and credible explanation of why the study fits NICHS's charitable purpose and priorities.

Strategy alignment

- NICHS's 2026–2029 strategy includes addressing unmet needs, reducing health inequalities, improving care and support, promoting prevention, influencing policy, and strengthening research and innovation.
- You do not need to mirror the strategy line by line. A clear link to one or more of these areas will usually strengthen an application, but it is not essential in every case. A proposal may still be fundable if it makes a strong and credible case for why NICHS should support it.



Remember, 100% of research funding comes from donors.

Plain English matters

Your application will be read by researchers, non-specialists and people with lived experience. Write clearly and respectfully. If this is not clear, your score may be lower. A non-specialist reader should be able to understand:

- what the study is about
- why it matters
- why NICHHS should fund it
- how it could make a difference

What reviewers are asking:

- Why should NICHHS fund this, using public donations?
- Does it align with the mission and priorities?
- Would NICHHS be happy to justify this study to donors and service users?

Reviewers do not expect:

- perfect alignment with every strategic priority
- immediate benefit from early-stage or exploratory work
- exaggerated claims about impact, policy influence or service change
- vague references to strategy without a real explanation of relevance

Reviewers do expect:

- a strong and credible case why this study matters to NICHHS.
- what the study will do now, what it could lead to next, and when real world benefits are likely to materialise.

All criteria are scored on 11 point scale.



This guide is prescriptive and is shared with reviewers. It is intended to show you the range of judgement applied. Reviewers use their own knowledge, experience and expertise to assess the whole application.

Indicative score	Descriptor	Description (illustrative / what this usually reflects)
9–10	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, detailed and convincing case for NICHHS funding, no real gaps or weak points • Strong and clearly explained relevance to Northern Ireland • Clear explanation of why this is a good use of donor funding • Easy to explain and justify to colleagues, donors, and the public • Clear and well thought-through plan to promote NICHHS as the funder, showing strong links to several parts of the strategy (e.g. helping people, improving services, building evidence, supporting future decisions) • No reputational concerns • clear added value for NICHHS reputation, learning or strategy <p>A reviewer might say: This is clearly a strong fit for NICHHS and makes a very confident case for funding.</p>
7–8	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good fit with NICHHS strategy • Relevance to Northern Ireland is clear • Gives a convincing reason for NICHHS to fund the work • Describes the value well, but not in as much detail or with the same strength as the best applications • Plan to promote NICHHS as funder is in place, but not as detailed or thorough • Overall, easy enough to explain and justify <p>A reviewer might say: This is a solid, fundable application and a good fit, but not exceptional."</p>

5–6	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some link to NICHHS, but quite general or limited • Only partly explains the benefit to Northern Ireland or NICHHS • Makes broad claims without enough supporting detail • Case for funding is acceptable, but not especially strong • Benefits seem reasonable but are not fully explained or convincing <p>A reviewer might say: This is within scope and acceptable, but the case for funding is not strong.</p>
3–4	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case for NICHHS funding is unclear or lacks detail • Says it is relevant, but does not show clearly how • Links to NICHHS mission or priorities are hard to follow • Little clear explanation of how people in Northern Ireland will benefit • Plans for sharing findings or engaging others are weak • Possible concerns about value or risk; benefits may be overstated • Difficult to explain or justify to donors <p>A reviewer might say: The case for NICHHS funding is unclear and not well supported.</p>