

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 NICHHS (the charity)
4. Value for money

Criterion 4: Value for Money

Key question: Is the budget right (and proportionate) for the study being proposed, and is it a good use of public donations?

What to consider

- fit between costs and work
- proportionate staffing and resources
- clear timing, management and delivery plan
- value for donor money

What reviewers are asking

- Is this budget right for this study?
- Are the resources in scale with the work?
- Can the study be done as proposed?
- Would this be easy to justify as a good use of donor funding?

Reviewers do not expect:

- the lowest possible cost,
- the same staffing or set-up for every study type,
- early-stage studies to look like full intervention studies,
- vague claims that a budget is reasonable without a clear explanation.

Reviewers do expect:

- a clear explanation of why each main cost is needed,
- staffing, time and other resources that fit the type, size and stage of the study,
- a workable plan for delivery, including how risks or delays will be handled,
- a budget that looks like a good use of public donations.

What your application should show

Value for money does not mean the cheapest option. It means the costs are right for the work, clearly explained, in scale with the type and stage of the study, and likely to lead to useful results.

- how the costs link to the work, key outputs and expected value,
- how staffing and other resources are realistic and in scale with the workload, the type of study and where it sits in the wider research plan,
- how key stages, outputs and timings are clear and realistic,
- how the study will be managed if plans change, delays happen or risks arise,
- why the study can realistically be done on time and within budget,
- what the study will deliver now, and where relevant, what it could lead to next.

Proportionality

- We assess value for money in proportion to the size, type and stage of the study.
- A small early-stage study should not be costed like a full intervention study.
- What matters is whether the people, time and money asked for make sense for this kind of study at this point in the research journey.

Plain English matters

- Your application will be read by specialists and non-specialists.
- A non-specialist reader should be able to understand what you are asking for, why you need it, and why the level of resource is right for this study.
- If this is not clear, your score may be lower.

This guide shows the kind of judgement reviewers may apply, so you can see what stronger and weaker answers look like.



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	Your case is exceptionally clear and convincing. The costs, staffing, timings and management are very well matched to the work, and the budget is easy to justify.
7–8	Strong	Your proposal gives a clear and convincing case. Resources fit the work well, staffing and timings are realistic, and any weaknesses are minor.
5–6	Adequate	Your application mostly makes sense and looks doable, but there are still some weaknesses, inefficiencies or open questions that may limit the score.
3–4	Weak	Some parts may be reasonable, but there are still important concerns about scale, staffing, timing, management or fit with the type of study.
0–2	Unsound	The budget and resource plan are very weak. Costs are not well explained, do not fit the work, or raise major doubts about whether the study can be done as proposed.