

SYLVIA & CHARLES VIERTEL CHARITABLE FOUNDATION



SENIOR MEDICAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How do I know if I am eligible?

The Fellowships target:

- early to mid-career researchers (no more than 10 years post doc);
- who are outstanding researchers;
- who are medically qualified, or PhD graduates of another scientific discipline with recognised post-doctoral achievements; and
- who are seeking to establish a research career in Australia and undertake research in an Australian academic institution.

2. Is there any flexibility in relation to the maximum of ten years working as a post doctorate?

The Medical Advisory Board and the Trustees are willing to take into consideration exceptional circumstances during the ten (10) year period. Examples of exceptional circumstances include major illness, maternity leave, carer responsibilities and other like career disruptions. The Foundation's approach to this criterion will be assessed based upon individual's application and guided by the NHMRC's *Career Disruption* and *Relative to Opportunity* policies.

The applicant must provide proof of their research doctorate award as per their academic record from their University. If you have had any current and/or past circumstances relevant to your postdoctoral period, please outline this in your CV as demonstrated below and optionally in your referees' and/or sponsor's letters

Template for outlining career disruption

Jane is 10 years post doctorate at the time of applying. During this time, she took one year of maternity leave and did not work. She then returned to work for three years working at 0.5 FTE due to caring duties.

Post Doctorate years worked = 10 years – 1 year – 3 years (0.5FTE)

Jane is consequently considered 7.5 years post doctorate.

3. My research career has been adversely impacted by COVID-19, will this reduce my chances of being successful?

The Medical Advisory Board evaluate and consider the impact of current/or past circumstances as part of their holistic assessment of the application. Disruptions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be claimed as a career disruption.

The assessment will also be guided by the NHMRC's *Career Disruption* and *Relative to Opportunity* policies in addition to NHMRC's *Principles of Peer Review*.

If you have current and/or past circumstances that have impacted your research career and that are relevant for the Medical Advisory Board to consider, please outline this in your CV and optionally in your referees' and/or sponsor's letters as outlined above.

4. Who do the Fellowship funds get paid to?

Funds can only be paid to Australian academic/research institutions that are endorsed as a charity (which covers most universities and not-for-profit medical research institutions). It is expected that this body will act as the administering institution for the Fellowship grant.

5. Can I apply for a Fellowship if I am not an Australian citizen or permanent resident?

No. To be eligible for the Viertel Senior Medical Research fellowships you must be able to prove that they are an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

6. Can Australians currently living overseas apply?

Yes. Australian researchers currently working overseas are encouraged to apply. Note however, that the Fellowship must be undertaken in Australia at an Australian research institution/University. The Foundation is only able to provide money, property or benefits for public charitable purposes in the Commonwealth of Australia. Therefore, an applicant must be sponsored to undertake the Fellowship research in an eligible Australian institution.

7. If a researcher holds a NHMRC grant or another Fellowship can they still apply?

A Viertel Foundation Fellow cannot concurrently hold another Fellowship which provides a salary.

Applicants who hold a NHMRC Investigator grant may, however, accept a Viertel Fellowship on the following terms. They will be awarded the full Viertel Senior Medical Research Fellowship (100% of their salary + some top-up discretionary funds) and may retain 100% of the Lab component of their Investigator Grant, but must return 100% of the Salary component of their Investigator Grant to NHMRC.

Where an applicant is prepared to rescind their other grant/fellowship should their Viertel application be successful, this should be made clear in their application. Such persons may retain the other Fellowship title, with the agreement of that Fellowship provider.

For the avoidance of doubt, if at the time of applying a candidate holds another fellowship/grant which provides for their salary, and the term of that grant/fellowship concludes by the end of the calendar year, then they would still be eligible to be awarded a Viertel Foundation Fellowship commencing the following year.

8. Do I need to have employment in place with a research institute prior to applying for the fellowships?

Yes. Part of the application process requires evidence of an agreed (current or future) employment arrangement with an Australian research institute.

9. The guidelines states that ethics approval must be sought and approved. Does this have to happen during the application period or can it be a condition met later in year?

Applicant Institutes are required to certify that Ethics approval has been sought or awarded. Applicants shortlisted for interview will then need to provide proof of ethics approval having been sought and/or approved. No award will be made until ethics approval has been granted by the Institutional Ethics Committees or Human Research and/or Animal Experimentation as appropriate. Fellowships must be taken up by the July of the year following the one in which they are awarded.

10. The guidelines outline that the Fellowships are intended to provide both salary and project grant support. Are there any restrictions on how much could be used for project costs?

The Foundation does not have hard and fast rules about this. The primary intention is to support the researcher, so it is important that they are able to draw an appropriate salary through the Fellowship. After that, whether they allocate some or all of the balance of funds to 'project costs' or to hiring a research assistant or something else related to their research, is largely left to the discretion of the Fellow. As the sponsor, the host organisation supports and wishes to retain a high calibre researcher by providing the candidate with employment and undertaking to cover to cover all indirect costs including institutional overheads, employment oncosts and any other administrative costs.

Please note that applications need only set out the first year's budget.

11. Can state and clinical loading be included in the budget?

The host organisation has the discretion to support the applicant with in-kind contributions to cover the costs that the fellowship cannot cover.

12. What does the selection process entail?

Each year applications open in early February and close on 30 April (opening and closing dates may occur on a weekend). There are then four key stages to the selection process:

1. The Foundation's Medical Advisory Board reviews all the written applications and creates a long list.
2. The long-listed applications are reviewed by experts in the relevant field and the Advisory Board then creates a shortlist of applicants who are invited to participate in the final stage of the selection process.
3. Shortlisted candidates give a short presentation on their work to a Viertel Symposium held in Brisbane in October and then participate in individual interviews with the Advisory Board.
4. The Trustees of the Foundation consider Fellowship recommendations from the members of the Medical Advisory Board.

13. What percentage of time must be spent on the Fellowship?

This Fellowship must constitute the Fellow's primary role.

14. Can I apply again if I have been previously unsuccessful?

Yes, you may re-apply providing that you are still eligible.

15. Are there any particular areas of science that the Fellowship supports or will not support?

The Senior Medical Research Fellowship is an integral part of the Foundation's intention to support outstanding medical researchers in Australia in the fields of medical science and public health. Outstanding researchers who are medically qualified or PhD graduates of another scientific discipline, with recognised post doctoral achievements seeking to establish a research career in Australia are encouraged to apply.

The Foundation's expert Advisory Board that oversees this grants program and reviews all applications has not set particular priority areas. Historically, we have had applications from across the medical and scientific research spectrum including nurses, 'basic' scientists, those working in public health and other fields such as psychology. The Advisory Board has been clear that each applicant and each application will stand on its merits. There is no priority to given to any particular area of research discipline. As long as you meet all the other requirements for the program your application would be considered.

16. Are there circumstances under which I am able to put my Fellowship on hold?

Fellows are subject to the employment conditions of their host institution. The Foundation – on the advice of its Advisory Board – will consider requests from Fellows to place their Fellowship on hold temporarily where those requests have the support of the Fellow's host institution. Parental Leave and periods of major illness are examples of situations where the Foundation will consider requests from Fellows to temporarily put their Fellowship on hold.

17. How many individual researchers from a given organisation can apply for a Fellowship?

Currently the Foundation does not have any limits on the number of applicants per organisation, although you must contact your organisation's grants/research office to discuss this submission in advance of submitting your application form as all applications are in competition with one another

18. Can grant funds be used to cover oncosts for project staff salaries and overheads?

Salary support for research personnel other than the applicant can be included in the budget with oncosts (ie Super, Work cover etc up to 25%). Administrative overheads are not permitted. The Foundation take the same approach as the NHMRC where the grant cannot be used to offset employment related costs that are provided under institution enterprise bargaining agreements over and above the limits permitted by the NHMRC.

19. Can the applicant nominate referees who are on their project team?

There is no restriction to who can be a referee. Reports are sent separately from the application and kept confidential. The applicant needs to select someone who can provide the information required in the referee guidelines. Referee is distinct from sponsor and have scientific experience relevant to the applicants area of research.

20. The eligibility criteria state that the applicant "does not currently hold a senior research or teaching position." Could you please provide clarification on what qualifies as a senior research or teaching position?

The key eligibility criterion for this fellowship is that applicants are full time researchers 4-10 years post doc. With that range of time post PhD, the definition of senior can vary between organisations. The fellowships are really about capability, achievement, and future potential. It is expected that the fellow will be employed to dedicate 100% of their time to research and that there will be no teaching or other demands on their time.

21. If a successful fellow were to receive a promotion during their tenure, would the Foundation allow the salary to be amended to be increased?

The funding envelope is very generous at \$275,000 per annum (total award \$1,375,000). The guidelines require that the funding is applied to the salary first (use for overheads and oncosts is not permitted) and any surplus is applied to direct research costs. There is no mechanism to provide additional funding to the annual grant amount.

22. Is pass date or conferral date used to calculate years post PhD?

Conferral date as stated on the academic record.

23. Who needs to certify my application?

Certification requires the organisation to accept certain conditions. Applicants need to follow their organisations internal processes and delegation of authority to sign documents.

24. Can funding be used to cover costs of work undertaken by overseas collaborators?

The guidelines require applicants to cover their salary first. Any remaining funds can be used for the purposes of conducting research at the applicant's discretion. This can include work done by collaborators overseas provided such work cannot be conducted in Australia. A justification would be required in the budget of the application.