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Application guidelines for research projects funded through the Superu Children and Families Research Fund

The objective of the Government's investment in the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ) study is to generate research that informs current government priority policy decisions. The Superu Children and Families Research Fund (the Fund) supports undertaking policy-relevant research projects using the GUiNZ data.

This guide is to assist government agencies, academics, public or independent research organisations, and non-government organisations to identify research issues that align with government priorities and to demonstrate policy fit and relevance.

The Fund is not to deliver business as usual research, but to deliver research that will make a difference to the social sector based on new analysis of the GUiNZ data. It should actively demonstrate that the proposed research would assist to develop solutions, support existing activities or prompt new activities or interventions. The research should not merely provide a restatement or refinement of an issue. It should also not replicate any other research being undertaken but could provide synergies with other initiatives.

Policy fit and relevance to social sector policy priorities

Applications to the Fund must demonstrate policy fit. The research must:

- align with existing Government priorities / Social Investment approach and a forward-looking research agenda for the social sector
- demonstrate how the GUiNZ data will be pivotal to research objectives, analyses and outcomes
- deliver impact for policy and/or services and add to the knowledge base
  be feasible to undertake within the stipulated conditions (e.g. fixed time as outlined in contract).

Defining the problem to be solved is critical to shaping the research focus. The research focus should aim to inform an emergent or enduring policy issue or to modify existing policy, practice or service delivery. Applicants are expected to have consulted or co-developed their thinking with the agencies or individuals they are expecting to partner or engage with in the research project.

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Social Sector Research Directions

Social Sector Research Directions developed by Superu[1] on behalf of the social sector provides an overarching set of research directions to inform potential lines of research inquiry. The Directions provide a considered basis for conversations between agencies and researchers about the level of 'fit' between their research proposals and government priorities.

Within the Directions, the following research areas, for instance, may provide a starting point for considering relevant policy issues where analysis of the GUiNZ data would underpin the research:

- Improve information about vulnerable populations – this includes identifying windows of opportunity for optimal government intervention through improved research on the life-course (i.e. research on human development aimed at informing policy and practice); understanding determinants of social disadvantage
- Develop a greater understanding of how resilience and strength-based approaches can improve outcomes for vulnerable populations– bringing together existing evidence from longitudinal data analysis
- Identify who is missing out on services and who is over-serviced – especially relevant as social investment models are increasingly adopted
- Understand the scale and impact of rapidly changing demographics, population movements, and evolving family and whānau/community roles/ structure – the changing role of parenting, families, and communities; migration patterns and increasing mobility and transience

Applicants are also encouraged to consider agencies' Statements of Intent, Annual Reports, Briefings for Incoming Ministers (BIM), and discussions with relevant agency staff to gain an understanding of policy issues and priorities that they face.

While these information sources provide a base to understanding broad policy priorities, applications to this Fund must show how their proposed research will address a specific policy need. How that will be done must be demonstrated alongside what the research will focus on and the anticipated outputs and outcome. Critically, the proposed research must demonstrate that it can provide credible findings, through a well-supported process with key influencing or uptake agencies or individuals, in a reasonable period[2] within the term of the research contract.

Translating into a research question

Given the focus on policy relevant research, the researcher will consider ways in which to best translate the broad area of research or topic into a specific research question(s). Some of the useful questions here maybe:

- What are we trying to achieve? (e.g. all children under 5 immunised)
- Do you know what children are not achieving this outcome?
- Do you know the main barriers that are preventing these children from achieving the outcome?

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[1] The full document that outlines in detail all 16 Research Areas identified within this Directions framework can be found here: superu.govt.nz/directions

[2] The term 'reasonable' is recognised as subjective. Note that the assessment panel will be looking for evidence that the applicant has realistic expectations of the timeframes likely to deliver impact relative to the scope of the proposed research and the environment it is likely to influence.

Again in shaping the policy problem, applicants could draw for instance on an issues paper that highlights the problem in a preliminary manner, any prior research or related policy documentation, or conversations with key stakeholders.

Impact of research

To maximise research uptake and use, the outputs and mechanisms of delivery should have been defined with the agencies or individuals they are expecting to partner or engage with in the research project. This early engagement will help the collaborative process by outlining the type of research findings that will be generated as well as assessing how they will be useful from a policy maker's perspective. In doing so, some of the questions to consider are:

- What information does the user or decision maker need to know to answer the policy question? For example:
    - that a relationship exists
    - the size of the relationship / the likely impact on an individual's outcome
    - the direction of the causal relationship
    - the types of children and families being impacted / not achieving the outcome of interest
- How precise do estimates need to be for the user or decision maker or how much error can they tolerate? Is a range going to be useful?
- What type of measures will be used (e.g. odds ratio)? What would be the strengths or limitations of any chosen measure relative to the actions that might be needed for decision-makers to act on the findings?
- What is the likely effect size that would substantiate public investment? What should be the expected minimum effect size for a given population of interest?