



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 guidance 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 work being undertaken but could provide synergies with other initiatives.

Fit with government 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 the research purpose
- deliver impact for policy and/or services and adds to the knowledge base, and
- be feasible to undertake within stipulated conditions (e.g. fixed time as outlined in contract).

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

* The full document that outlines in detail all 16 Research Areas identified within this Directions framework can be found at superu.govt.nz/priorities



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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 through improved research on the life course (i.e. research on human development aimed at informing policy and practice); causal determinants of social disadvantage.
- Develop a greater understanding of resilience and strength based approaches – 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 period¹ within and beyond the term of the research contract.

Defining the policy problem

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.

Prompts to define the policy problem include:

- What is the problem, issue or opportunity? What on-flow effects or subsidiary issues do they create? What brings it to public attention?
- Why and how do the issues and the on-flow effects occur? What conditions or drivers lead to it?
- What boundaries are needed to define the problem, issue or opportunity?

¹ 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.

- Whose behaviour is affected, or whose concerns are relevant? Who are the target beneficiaries of solutions to the problem? Who could help solve it e.g. policy researchers, policy makers, decision-makers, service providers, others?
- What stake does each (affected groups, target beneficiaries, implementers of policy) have in the problem or in addressing it?
- What makes it a significant public policy problem? What are the private and public costs and benefits associated with addressing it?
- What is already known about the problem? What more could be done with the resources, skills and expertise available? In what ways can this research help minimise the uncertainty and risk associated with addressing this policy problem?
- Why is research required to solve the problem i.e. what other mechanisms are possible that research could assist?
- What cross-sector implications are there and to whom?

Translating into 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?

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.

Tailoring the research results

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?

And thinking of research impact...

- How will this information be communicated to the decision maker or user? For example, how will you help the user decide if the impact will make a meaningful difference to a person's life outcome?
- In what ways will the audience engage with the information provided? What type of information will help them develop their thinking or decision-making?
- What actions/decisions could result from this research for the end-user?