

HIGH-VALUE  
NUTRITION

Ko Ngā Kai  
Whai Painga

# Request for Expressions of Interest

**November 2016**

Amended 15 Nov 2016 (v2)

**For 1 Priority Research Programme :**

**1. Infant Complementary Feeding – “Immune  
Protection”**

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Host Institution



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NOTE - This Request for Expressions of Interest is issued by the University of Auckland, as High-Value Nutrition Challenge Contractor, on behalf of the High-Value Nutrition Board.

# 1. KEY INFORMATION

- > Expressions of Interest (EoI) are requested from any organisation with a presence in New Zealand, and capabilities and experience in relation to the Priority Research Programme.
- > The EoI should briefly outline the information specified in this Request document in sufficient detail to enable High-Value Nutrition National Science Challenge (HVN) Challenge Director to determine the applicants' ability to successfully perform the work.
- > HVN management will invite up to three applicants to complete a more detailed proposal and may subsequently enter into negotiation with the applicant which is offering the best overall proposal in their sole opinion.
- > Key dates
  - 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016 – Open Request for Expressions of Interest released
  - 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016 – Expressions of Interest due for submission by 12noon (by email to [hvn@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:hvn@auckland.ac.nz))
  - 5- 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016 – Successful applicants informed and invited to submit detailed proposals [follows Governance review meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016]
  - 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017 – Proposals due by 12noon
  - 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017 – Lead applicant identified and contract negotiated

The processes outlined in subsequent sections are based on delivering to this timeline but HVN reserves the right to alter the timeline at any point.

## 2. THE HIGH-VALUE NUTRITION CHALLENGE

The High-Value Nutrition National Science Challenge (HVN or the Challenge) is a government research investment that aims to support the New Zealand food and beverage export sector develop a globally competitive, if not leading, position in the production, manufacture and marketing of food and beverages with scientifically validated health benefits for consumers in major export markets.

The Business and Science Plans for HVN were approved by the government's Science Board in March 2015 and the Challenge Contractor (The University of Auckland) has entered into a Challenge Programme Agreement with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment for the period to mid-2019.

A copy of these Business and Science Plans are available on the [HVN website](#) along with a background paper on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) the Challenge is contracted to deliver and provides the context for this Request. This Request is focussed on supporting the measurement and reporting of the HVN KPIs.

**The long term aspirational target for HVN is to support development of additional export revenue to New Zealand of >\$1B p.a. in New Zealand origin food and beverages with scientifically validated health benefits based at least in part on HVN funded research and related activities by 2025.**

HVN has invested in research via several different funding mechanisms to support achievement of this target, including:

- **Priority Research Programmes** – as described in the Business and Science Plans in the areas of:
  - o Metabolic health;
  - o Gut health;
  - o Immune health;
  - o Science of foods for health
  - o Consumer insights on foods-for-health
- **Contestable Projects** – which were contracted following a request for proposals in 2015.

In this regard, HVN is calling for expressions of interest to secure a science leader and team to develop a proposal for the Priority Research Programme area of **Infant Complementary Feeding, with the benefit of 'immune protection'**.

### 3. BACKGROUND TO CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

#### 3.1 Infant Complementary Feeding for Immune Protection

The HVN Science Plan approved a Priority Investment Programme that would be developed on the basis of Early Life Immune Tolerance with a focus on prevention of allergy. This proposal had been selected to be funded on Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 2014, as priority under the umbrella of “Maternal and Child Health”. However, it has been subject to further scrutiny, questioned in terms of regulatory freedom-to-operate, and further delayed due to unforeseen managerial and personnel changes.

As indicated earlier, the ultimate KPI for HVN is the additional food and beverage export revenues to New Zealand based on validated food-health relationships deriving in some way from HVN-facilitated or aligned activities. The target is to support the creation of a horizontal sector of high-value food and beverage exports generating revenue to New Zealand of \$1B p.a. above 2015 levels by 2025.

The evidential standard for products marketed on health benefits for consumers is the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) Standard 1.2.7 Nutrition, Health and Related Claims. This allows for consumer product claims to be approved by FSANZ. The HVN KPI and target is not limited to food and beverage products with an approved health claim however, and can include products marketed on a health basis where the same evidential standard is achieved.

In light of these factors, the HVN Challenge Director and Chief Scientist organised an Infant Nutrition Workshop on Oct. 28<sup>th</sup> 2016 at the University of Otago House in Auckland. Twenty two experts in the science and business of infant nutrition convened to discuss whether there was sufficient interest to proceed with investment in the Early Life Nutrition programme, and – if yes – how to move forward with the HVN Research Proposal “Early Life Immune Tolerance”. The workshop also discussed potential regulatory risks with increasing inability to make health claims on products for infant/toddler consumption, and whether the risks outweighed potential benefits of investment.

The workshop participants agreed to:

(a) move forward with the Early Life Nutrition programme, with a recommendation to consider this in the context of Complementary Feeding<sup>\*</sup>;

(b) strengthen the original proposal towards more translational science and shifting the focus from “Allergy” to “Protection against Infections”; and

(c) prepare a call for an “Expression of Interest” to be sent out to the NZ research community in immunology, nutrition and related research fields in order to secure and establish a new scientific leader and team to develop a full proposal to present to the HVN Board for funding allocation.

HVN is therefore seeking expressions of interest from suitably qualified and experienced research investigators to develop the full proposal in the field of Infant Complementary Feeding for Immune Protection

*\* Complementary Feeding as defined by WHO is: the process starting when breast milk alone is no longer sufficient to meet the nutritional requirements of infants, and therefore other foods and liquids are needed, along with breast milk. The transition from exclusive breastfeeding to family foods – referred to as complementary feeding – typically covers the period from 6 - 24 months of age, even though breastfeeding may continue to two years of age and beyond*

## 3.2 Scientific scope

Questions to be answered:

1. How can complementary feeding improve the infant's protection against infections via alteration of the microbiome or other mechanisms?
2. How can complementary feeding improve the infant's response to vaccination, or an alternative measure of a healthy immune response?

Expected outcomes:

1. Less frequent infections and fewer sick days for the infant.
2. Improved vaccine response of the infant – or an alternative proxy measure of immune function.

Envisaged approach:

1. Only clinical research that will deliver the outcomes will be considered
2. Consideration should be given to the Mission of HVN to: Develop high-value food with validated health benefits to drive economic growth through research excellence in the following research themes:  
**Clinical application** (demonstration of a health or wellbeing benefit from a food consumed by humans);  
**Biomarkers** (defining the biomedical mechanisms and indicators for the food health relationship);  
Meeting **consumer preferences** for and motivations to purchase healthy foods;  
**Food science** and technology (ensuring the foods deliver the health benefit to consumers).

## 4. PROJECT SIZE, COST AND TIMINGS

There is a limited budget available for this programme and could be in the order of up to \$2m. Expressions of interest should indicate likely costs broken down by components of research vs non-research costs. The investment period will begin once sub-contracting processes are completed, with the full final report required by 31 March 2019. Consideration may be given to how this work may lead into future programmes in the next HVN funding period of 2019-2025.

## 5. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Expressions of interest will be assessed by HVN Challenge Director in consultation with a number of external reviewers against the following criteria:

- Evidence of past experience in undertaking similar projects
- Demonstration of relevant capability (quality, depth and scope) to undertake the work including cvs of the key individuals who would be involved and their roles
- Conceptual outline of proposed methodological approach
- Description of high-level components of the proposed approach
- Estimated costings and high-level budget for the overall project
- Impact on Vision Mātauranga

The process for selecting Expressions of Interest to invite to full proposal is as follows:

- **Preliminary discussions to clarify any aspects of the Request and any background information on HVN** – applicants may seek a discussion with HVN Challenge Director at any time up until the deadline for submission (Note – this is limited to one session per applicant for up to 1 hour). Contact [hvn@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:hvn@auckland.ac.nz) to arrange.

- **Deadline for Expressions of Interest and Format** – all applications to be submitted as PDFs via email by 12noon on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016 to [hvn@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:hvn@auckland.ac.nz). The expression of interest should identify the project being addressed, provide a description of the overall approach to the project including methodology outcomes and address all the criteria listed above. Format is optional but should be in an easily readable font.
- **Assessment of Eols** – The process will be led by the Challenge Director in consultation with a number of external reviewers, including some members of the HVN International Science Advisory Panel to ensure robust independent assessment. They will assess all Eols against the criteria (assessing as High/Medium or Low against each) before reaching a holistic assessment of which, if any, should be invited to submit a full proposal. Outcomes of this will be shared with the HVN Governance Board. Unsuccessful applicants will be advised they have been unsuccessful. Any conflicts of interest will be managed as per the HVN Conflicts of Interest Policy, and if necessary additional external peer review will be sought.
- **Invitation to Develop and Submit a Full Proposal** – Up to three applicants submitting Eols will be invited to develop a full proposal. These short-listed applicants will be invited to an interview with HVN Management to discuss their Eol and confirm requirements and expectations for the full proposal. Any specific instructions relating to the full proposal and subsequent process will be provided to the short-listed applicants at that time and will respond to the information provided in the Eol with the intention it should be focussed on defining expectations and addressing gaps.

NOTE – By submitting an Eol proposal under this request the applicant organisation is agreeing to enter a subcontract with the University of Auckland (as the HVN Challenge Contractor) based on a customised subcontract template approved by the HVN Board.

## 6. OTHER ISSUES

### 6.1. PROPOSALS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY AN ORGANISATION WITH A PRESENCE IN NEW ZEALAND

Any proposals responding to this Request must be submitted by a legal entity with an office or contact personnel in New Zealand to facilitate interactions with HVN.

### 6.2. RELIANCE ON INFORMATION

HVN will rely on the veracity of all information provided in an Eol under this Request. Any evidence that information cannot be relied on may result in the proposal being disqualified from the process.

### 6.3. NAMING INDIVIDUALS OR ENTITIES

Any individuals or legal entities named within any proposal must have agreed to the use of their names and the context in which it is presented as well as approving any quotes or other attributions to them. Failure to obtain such agreement may lead to disqualification from the process.

### 6.4. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The HVN Intellectual Property Principles and Management Plan is available on the HVN website. Any Intellectual Property created under any subcontract arising from this Request shall be made available to HVN unencumbered and may be used, published, or presented in any form it sees fit.

### 6.5. CONFIDENTIALITY

The University of Auckland (as Challenge Contractor for HVN) will treat all Eols under this Request as confidential subject to any legal requirements under the Official Information Act 1982 or any other relevant law. Eols will be viewed by the HVN Challenge Director, external reviewers, and, potentially, the HVN Board. Proposals will be stored electronically in a folder accessible only to HVN team (and UoA IT staff).

Notwithstanding the above, the University of Auckland through the HVN Challenge may make the following information publically available:

- The names of any successful applicants
- The title of any funded proposals and subsequent subcontracts
- The amount awarded to any successful proposals and the funding period
- A public summary provided by the applicant
- Other information agreed with the applicant / subcontractor from time to time

#### **6.6. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

HVN's Conflicts of Interest Policy is available on request. Applicants should note any potential conflicts they have with any person involved in the assessment and approval of the proposal.

#### **6.7. EXCLUSION OF LIABILITY**

By participating in this Request process, each applicant waives any rights it may have to make any claim against the University of Auckland or the HVN Board or Management in regard to any matter related to or arising from the Request. Further, if any matter cannot be excluded by law then the maximum liability of the University of Auckland and the HVN Board is limited to \$1.

#### **6.8. OBLIGATIONS OF APPLICANTS**

Applicants agree to enter into the Request process in good faith and to fulfil the expectations it creates for them. This includes maintaining confidential correspondence from HVN in confidence, and acting reasonably in agreeing any subsequent subcontract if awarded funding. This includes accepting the obligations for constructing all elements of the subcontract required to the satisfaction of the HVN Management and to providing all information required for reporting progress to the HVN Board and MBIE during the term of any subcontract.

#### **6.9. COMPLAINTS**

Any applicant research organisation may complain to the University of Auckland about any aspect of the process under this Request. The University of Auckland will pass any complaints on to the HVN Board to investigate and respond to. Applicants will accept the findings of any review by the HVN Board in good faith and take no further action in relation to it. In considering any complaint the HVN Board will assess whether the processes outlined in this Request were followed in good faith and that the outcome in relation to the complaint is a reasonable consequence of following the process.

Individuals have no standing under this Request and any complaints from an individual will be referred back to their employing organisations.

#### **6.10. CONTACT**

If you wish to clarify any aspect of this Request or arrange a discussion on a potential proposal please send an email with your request to [hvn@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:hvn@auckland.ac.nz).

#### **6.11. DISCLAIMER**

Disclaimer: The University of Auckland on behalf of the HVN Board reserves the right to withdraw or amend this document and/or the timelines set within it at any time.



## 7. REQUIRED INFORMATION

1. Project Name

2. Proposed Project Team Leaders/Collaborators (please attach CVs)

Name	Institution	Proposed Role

3. Conflicts of interest to register in relation to this proposal

4. Brief overview of your current international and national research in the area of the proposed research (max ½ page)

5. Brief outline of proposed research, including timeframes and outcomes/outputs (max 1 page)

6. How is this research informed by Vision Mātauranga?

7. Indicative budget (research and non-research related costs).