Guidance for Project grant and Proof-of-Principle grant applications

Guidance for all applicants

Please refer to our Terms and Conditions and Research Strategy when completing your application. These, along with information about the call, can be downloaded from the Help – Support Documents quick link on the online application portal homepage, or from the Help – Support Documents drop-down item in the top right-hand corner of any webpage when you are logged in to Smart Simple.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

To apply you should submit the following:

1. An application using our online application form, by 3pm on Wednesday 17 January 2024.
2. A signed copy of the scientific application by email to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org, which can arrive up to three weeks after the submission deadline.
    a. We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.
    b. If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only provided you annotate the page with the grant reference.

Applications will not be accepted after the submission deadline.

The following points should be considered when submitting your application:

- All applications should be submitted through our online grants-management system, Smart Simple (https://mduk.smartsimpleuk.com/). If you do not have an existing profile on Smart Simple you must create one. If you do not work in an institution that is already listed on our system, you may need to contact us to help you create the profile.

- If you wish to apply for a Muscular Dystrophy UK research grant, please be aware that the principal investigator must hold a contract that extends beyond the duration of the grant at an institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. For the 2024 Grant Round, Muscular Dystrophy UK will only fund UK-based research although international collaboration is encouraged.

- If you currently hold a Muscular Dystrophy UK-funded project or studentship grant, you may still apply.

- Each applicant can submit up to one application per grant type in a grant round. Multiple applications for the same grant type will not be accepted.

- We welcome project and proof-of-principle applications from early-career researchers. Researchers should have a research degree e.g. PhD or MD OR, if an allied health professional, should have a postgraduate degree (PhD, MPhil or Masters degree) and/or demonstrate significant experience with trial procedures, conducting research and monitoring its progress.

- A single resubmission of previous MDUK grant application is allowed and should be indicated as such in the relevant field in the application form.

Remit

- Muscular Dystrophy UK welcomes applications that will have a benefit for individuals with any of the muscular dystrophies or related neuromuscular conditions. We are looking to support research across the breadth of conditions supported by the charity, and welcome applications for rare and very-rare conditions as well as the more common ones. Please refer to the list of conditions supported by Muscular Dystrophy UK. If a specific neuromuscular condition does not appear in this list and you want to make a research application related to that condition, please contact our grant helpline for guidance (researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

- At the present time specific funds are available for projects related to facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy (FSHD), limb girdle muscular dystrophy (LGMD) and LMNA congenital muscular dystrophy and we would especially welcome applications in these areas. This should not dissuade applicants who are applying for funding of other conditions as all applications are subject to the same review criteria.

- It is important for applicants to view their research strategically and explain how this proposed research fits with the charity's Research Strategy in answer to the relevant question in the application form.

- In the development of diagnostic tools, there must be clear evidence of the exploitation route and pathway to adoption.

- Research to develop animal models must demonstrate a clear route to a therapeutic application. We will only fund the creation and phenotyping of new animal models when there is no alternative available.

- Research projects collecting natural history data should be multi-centre and of sufficient duration and size to collect relevant and useful data. It is important that there is a harmonised approach across the field and applications should include international communication and/or collaboration. They should include multiple outcome measures (and where possible include multi-system measures) to be of maximum value to researchers and funders. The application should include a plan for financial sustainability in the longer term.

- Applicants looking for support for an infrastructure grant, such as a patient registry, please contact Muscular Dystrophy UK to discuss potential funding opportunities outside of the grant round.

When completing the online form:

- Please complete all sections of the application form. Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk.

- You may find it easier to draft the questions offline and copy and paste them into the online form when complete. Please note that when copying and pasting from Word, formatting (such as italics, bold, underlining) will be lost, but paragraphs will be kept.

- Word limits must be adhered to.

- Uploaded documents must be in pdf format.

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- You can save your application at any time and come back to complete it later. You can also download a pdf of your application at any point.

If you still have questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

Guidance for completing an online project grant application form

In Smart Simple, please go to My Profile and complete the required fields. This information will then be used to auto-populate the relevant fields in your grant application(s). Submissions cannot be completed unless the required fields in your profile are complete. For future grant calls you will be prompted to review your My Profile information to ensure it is up to date.

People

Who can apply for a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant

- Principal applicants must hold a contract at an Institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. We are only able to fund research within the UK at the present time, although international collaborations are encouraged. Any exceptions to this will be made known when the grant call(s) are announced – please check the [Grant Round 2024](#) page for more information.

- We welcome applications from early-career researchers (defined as researchers who possess a PhD who have not yet gained, or are transitioning to, an independent research career) as well as existing principal investigators.

- Researchers should have a research degree e.g. PhD or MD OR, if an allied health professional, should have a postgraduate degree (PhD, MPhil or Masters degree) and/or demonstrate significant experience with trial procedures, conducting research and monitoring its progress

Principal Investigator

In this section we want to understand the track record of the Principal Investigator.

The Principal Investigator (supervisor) should have a contract of sufficient duration to cover the length of the proposed project. This is what we aim to understand when we ask the questions regarding "The length of the Principal Applicant's contract with the employing Institution" and "Where does the funding for the Principal Applicant's salary come from?" If you do not have a contract of sufficient length, we may request a letter of support from your Head of

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Department to provide a guarantee that the project will be adequately supervised for its duration.

Co-applicant details

To add a Co-applicant the Principal Investigator (the Applicant) must have the Co-applicant's PIN. To get a PIN, the Co-applicant must create a profile in Smart Simple. The PIN can be found on the co-applicant's profile page. The Principal Investigator should request the PIN from the co-applicant and enter it on the application form to assign the Co-applicant to the grant application. The Co-applicant will be able to view the application and make changes, but only the Principal Investigator can submit the form.

Co-applicants can view the application by selecting the Grants and Applications tab from the home page and selecting the Associated Applications tab in the Draft Applications section.

Please ensure you enter the number of hours the Co-applicant will be dedicating to the project.

Collaborators

Please enter the details of all collaborators in the table provided; a letter of collaboration is required from each one. Please use the filename format, 'Letter-of-collaboration-[FirstInitial-surname]' to name the files and upload them in pdf format. The letters can be uploaded using the upload buttons. Note that the number of collaborator letters must match the number of collaborators in order for your application to be submitted.

Proposed researcher

If the proposed researcher is known, please enter their details.

Project Summary

Expected start date

You will receive the outcome of your grant application in late July 2024. The expected start date of the project should therefore not be before September 2024.

Project and proof-of-principle grants should start within six months of the award date. If you are awarded a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant and experience delays that mean you cannot start within 6 months, please contact us at Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

The expected start date is merely a guide. It will appear on your award letter should you be successful in gaining an MDUK grant, but it is not binding. Please refer to our Terms and Conditions which sets out the expectations with regards to project start dates after the award is made.

Project length

Project grants of 24 or 36 months in duration are available. Proof-of-principle awards can be for between 6 and 12 months. Please note that if you are applying for a grant of less than 12 months duration you should select 12 months from the drop-down menu and indicate in the proposal text the duration of the grant.

Condition

Please select the single most relevant condition for your application as the primary condition.

You should select the overarching group name for the condition, following which you will be given the option to select the exact condition. For example, if you are looking for Duchenne muscular dystrophy you should select, 'muscular dystrophy' and then 'Duchenne muscular dystrophy'.

When you select the group heading, if there are additional condition sub-types, e.g. Duchenne muscular dystrophy, myotonic dystrophy type 1, they will appear in the sub-type, drop down menu.

You will then be able to select other relevant conditions using the tick boxes. Please select the group heading and sub-type.

Resubmission

A single resubmission of previous MDUK grant application is allowed. Please indicate whether the application is a resubmission of an application previously submitted to Muscular Dystrophy UK.

If so, please highlight any differences/amendments that have been made to the original application in the main body of the proposal.

Submission to multiple funders

Muscular Dystrophy UK will only consider an application if we are currently the only funder doing so. If your application is currently with another funder, we will not process your application. You are welcome to apply in future should your application elsewhere be unsuccessful.

The Proposal

Background to the proposal

Please provide sufficient background to give peer reviewers and members of the research committee an understanding of the basis for your proposal and summarise any research that gives your proposal context. Note that, while peer reviewers will be selected for their expertise, some members of the research committee may not have relevant expertise and may rely on this section of the proposal. When completing this section please consider:

- If you have preliminary data, please refer to it in the text and upload it in the supplementary information section at the bottom of the Proposal tab.
- Formatting does not always pull through when pasting from Word documents. Please check that special characters are present in your pasted text (this also pertains to other sections below where you might use special characters).

Hypothesis or reasoning

This is an opportunity for you to make a clear, brief statement to outline the underlying scientific hypothesis for your project. If, for any reason this is not possible, please outline the reasoning that underpins your project.

Methods of research including overall study design

This section allows you to include the specifics of your methods and any key elements of study design. This will be dependent on the nature of your project but please consider the following elements that are sometimes omitted from applications:

- This is a good place to ensure that any power calculations that underpin your study design have been included.
- If there are elements of the project that could be considered high-risk please include any plans you have for mitigation: what alternative plans would you put in place to make sure the project succeeds?
- Make sure your study design aligns with the costings you have provided – do not leave out costings for any elements of the project.
- If your project is clinical, describe any attempts you are making to include patients in the trial design.

Objectives, timescales and milestones

Please give us a list of objectives for your research. When doing so please ensure that **the objectives align perfectly with the ones you write in your plain English application**. It is important that the content of the scientific application and the plain English application do not differ so that the Lay Research Panel and Medical Research Committee review the same content, albeit in different language.

In this section we also want you to detail the key milestones for your project. Peer reviewers and the research committee will review the milestones as part of the process of reviewing your proposal. In addition, should the project be funded, we will review progress of the project each year against these milestones before releasing the next year's funds. It is, therefore, crucial that your milestones are clear and achievable.

Please ensure that milestones and timelines for your project match the Gantt chart provided in the next section.

Citing and referencing published work

Citations: please ensure citations are clearly marked and separable when reading the text. Note that formatting does not carry over into the form.

References: Please use Vancouver referencing style (see here for guidance), but please expand author line to include up to 20 authors if the Principal Applicant, Co-Applicant(s) or collaborators are authors.

Detailed justification of financial support

Please help us to understand how your request for support breaks down. We would like to know:

- The expected salary for each person on the grant and the percentage full-time equivalent (FTE). If FTE varies from year to year, please indicate this.

- Are there any rises in salary expected due to inflation alone. Please detail the percentage rise in salary each year.
- Please list likely types of consumables, approximate costs for categories of consumables and the year in which they are expected to be required (see also guidance on the Finance section below). For clinical studies, applicants are expected to include costs relating to participant reimbursement (e.g., travel costs). Details of major consumables costs are also requested under the "finance" tab.

Please use this section to upload supplementary information or data relevant to the grant proposal, e.g. figures, tables, timescales. Files must be in pdf format.

Finance

The Summary of Financial Support Requested table should include all costs being requested from Muscular Dystrophy UK for this project. Please refer to information about the call for guidance on the amount of funding that can be requested.

You can apply for any combination of salary and consumables. Nationally awarded salary increases will only be allowed if they have been provided for in the grant application. Reasonable allowance for such increases whether known, pending or anticipated must be included and justified in the grant application.

The funding restrictions for this grant type are:

- Project grants: £75,000 per year
- Proof-of-principle grants: up to £30,000

Finance: Exclusions

- Travel costs can only be requested if the travel is an integral part of the project; this must be clearly demonstrated in the grant application.
- We do not cover the costs of attending scientific meetings or society membership and these should not be included in the application.
- We will not cover recruitment costs.
- We do not fund computer equipment unless integral to the projects (for example, bioinformatics projects)
- We do not fund equipment costs unless integral to the project. We expect laboratories to provide and maintain equipment for general use and only under specific circumstances where specialist equipment is required will we consider providing funding.
- Generally, we do not provide equipment maintenance costs. However, we *may* provide maintenance costs for equipment if (1) it is specific to the project, and (2) if without the requested funds the project would not proceed. If such funds are requested, please include them under "consumables" costs and provide a rationale for the requested funds in the "Detailed justification of financial support" section under "the proposal" tab.
- We will not cover publication costs.

Applicants are strongly advised to confirm with the Finance Office of their Institution that the amounts specified in their submission are accurate.

Excess treatment costs

For all clinical research that needs Health Research Authority (HRA) approval (refer to criteria for HRA approval), a Schedule of Events Costs Attribution Template (SoECAT) must be completed, approved and submitted with the grant application. Only clinical research needs HRA approval. For researchers carrying out clinical research outside of England, please contact our grants helpline at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org for guidance.

You will need the assistance of a local AcoRD specialist to complete and approve the SoECAT form. For further information see the NIHR website.

We strongly recommend that you contact your local AcoRD specialist as soon as you know you are planning a piece of clinical research, to allow sufficient time for completion and approval of SoECAT before the grant application deadline.

From 1 April 2023 applicants will be required to use the online NIHR Central Portfolio Management System (CPMS). In order to create a SoECAT, you will need to create and activate an account in CPMS. Please refer to the user guide for further guidance on creating an account.

Guidance for completion of the SoECAT is present in an online tool. Further details can be found on the Online SoECAT Guidance page and within the Online SoECAT Guidance Module, which includes video tutorials and linked resources (an NIHR Learn account is required to access and enrol onto this module).

Assistance with designing your research application is also available from the NIHR CRN and Research Design Service.

Once the form has been completed and authorized, please save the 'study information' and 'summary' page of the 'Funder Export' form as a single PDF and upload it with your application in the Finance section of the application form. If the final form cannot be completed prior to submission of the application, you must contact us at Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org to explain the delay.

Please note that MDUK is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). You may find more useful information on the AMRC website here.

Animal Research

Please refer to the NC3Rs' ARRIVE guidelines when designing animal experiments and ensure you report animal-based studies in accordance with the ARRIVE guidelines. Grant holders are required to implement the principles found in the NC3Rs' guidance document, Responsibility in the use of Animals in Bioscience Research. For more information and guidance about the use of animals in research see the NC3Rs website.

If the research involves use of higher animals (cats, dogs, equines, pigs, non-human primates), the proposal will be sent to NC3Rs for specialist peer review. This will be in addition to the regular scientific peer reviews of the application. If non-human primates are being used, the grant holder must ensure compliance with the NC3Rs' Guidelines for Primate Accommodation, Care and Use.

Any costs associated with animal research should be fully detailed in the Animal Costs Details table and included in the Summary of Financial Support Requested table in the Finance tab.

When completing the Animal Costs Details table please note that the Summary Totals table will automatically update with the totals from the tables below. Tables for animal purchase costs, animal maintenance costs and experimental procedures costs are given for each year of the grant, please use the '+' button to add rows as required.

Muscular Dystrophy UK supports the Association of Medical Research Charities' policy on animal research – please refer to our position statement on animal research.

Ethical Issues

If the grant is awarded, it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all necessary ethics approvals are in place **before** the start of the project. If you wish to activate the project before ethics approval is in place, please contact us at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org to discuss the issue further. The grant will not be activated until the Research Team are satisfied that lack of ethics approval will not impede the project or influence timelines.

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Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

Please refer to our Terms and Conditions for information about intellectual property and ensure that the conditions are met if the proposed research is likely to lead to patentable or commercially exploitable results.

We use information from your main application and your plain English application in order to fundraise and to communicate about the work we fund. In order not to create a prior disclosure that would damage chances of commercial development, we need to understand what elements of your proposal must be kept strictly confidential.

Details of your application are shared in confidence with peer reviewers, members of our Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Committee and the Board of Trustees and when relevant, charitable trusts and other donors.

Application in Plain English

All grant applicants are required to complete an application in plain English which provides an overview of the proposed work. This will be assessed by Muscular Dystrophy UK's Lay Research Panel. The Panel does not receive the scientific application and therefore the plain English application should act as a stand-alone piece but should accurately reflect the content and objectives of the scientific application. The application in plain English should accurately reflect the content of the scientific application. The plain English application will initially be assessed by members of the Muscular Dystrophy UK Research Team, and you may be asked to make changes should the two applications differ.

The Panel meets and discusses all the applications and their relevance to and impact on people with a muscular dystrophy or related neuromuscular conditions. Their recommendations will be presented to the Medical Research Committee by two representatives of the Panel. These representatives will take part in the discussion and voting during the Medical Research Committee meeting. The information you provide in this form will therefore form a significant part of the awards process.

The members of the Lay Research Panel do not have a scientific background so please do not use scientific terminology or jargon. Please also refrain from including references to material that is not available to the general public. Avoid the use of abbreviations where possible. You may find it helpful to ask a non-scientist friend or relative to read this application prior to submission to check readability. Please visit the [news section](#) of our website to see the level of plain English we would expect you to use and refer to the [guidance](#) we have developed

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with the Lay Panel on writing your plain English application. Your application in plain English will be screened by the members of the Research Team. You will be asked to rewrite the application if it is too technical. The plain English application will then be seen by members of the Lay Research Panel at an early stage during the application review process. You may be asked to make changes to your application to clarify its contents or to make it more readable. Failure to provide sufficient and understandable information in the plain English application could lead to rejection of the application.

The information contained in the plain English application will be treated as confidential. Further guidance on each section is given below. More useful resources and guidance to help you write your application in plain English can be found on the [NIHR website](#).

Background

What is the background to your application? Does the topic require an introduction? Why is the research question that you are addressing important? Please put this in context of other ongoing research and describe the collaborations that will facilitate this research. Please consider adding the following where relevant

- What is the prevalence and/or incidence of the condition you are studying
- Any details of the condition that make a compelling case for your research

Objectives

Please provide concise bullet points of the objectives of your research. The objectives must align with those stated in the scientific application. You may be asked to amend the application if they do not.

Outcomes

Please give details of the expected outcomes of your research. How will this research project take us towards a treatment or clinical benefit for muscle disease either in the short or longer term?

Experimental Plan

The Lay Panel will not be making a judgement on the strengths and weaknesses of the science, however a general understanding of the research proposal is helpful. Please give a brief overview, of what you plan to do. If applicable, this should include information about the experimental approaches to be employed, the types of samples to be analysed and how they will be sourced, rationale for

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the use of animal models, and how human subjects will be selected and recruited.

Next Steps

If the project is successful, what are the next steps? Where will you apply for further funding?

Budget

The information in the budget table will be taken from the Finance tab on your application. Please briefly justify the requested costs.

Involving Patients

Are people with a muscle or nerve disease directly involved in your research (e.g. participants in a clinical study)? If so, please give details and describe how the results of the research will be fed back to participants.

Impact for Participants

If this is a clinical study, what will the study involve for the participants? How many visits, what happens at each visit, are there risks and how are these mitigated?

Engaging Supporters

Much of the funding for Muscular Dystrophy UK's research programme comes from families and supporters of the charity. Please explain how you will engage people whose lives are affected either directly or indirectly by muscle disease during the course of your project.

Supporting Documentation

This section can be used for uploading additional documents that are relevant to your application, e.g. a letter of support from someone who is not a co-applicant or collaborator. Files must be in pdf format.

Please ensure you upload salary scales (see "detailed justification for financial support" section above).

Further information

Please indicate in this section if you would like to receive further correspondence from Muscular Dystrophy UK. GDPR requires that we have approval to keep your

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details for a specific purpose. For research and other mailings we may keep your details indefinitely for the purposes to which you agree. You can ask for your details to be removed at any time by contacting researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

Application Review

All applications are sent for external peer review prior to being reviewed by our Medical Research Committee. We would like you to suggest three reviewers to review your application. These reviewers should be independent experts who you or your co-applicant(s) have not published with in the past three years and who do not work at the same institute/university as any of the applicants. Please give their full names, the institutes at which they are based, their email addresses and a justification of why they are suitable to review your application.

Departmental Support

This section *cannot* be completed online.

After submitting your application you will receive a pdf version of the application by email. Please send a copy of the signed form to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

a. We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.
b. If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only, provided you annotate the page with the grant reference

The application must be signed by

- Your Head of Department in which the proposed research and training will be carried out, or an appropriate signatory e.g. Dean, if the applicant is Head of Department.
- The principal investigator
- An authorised member of your Research Office/Finance department

Please send the signed electronic copy of the application to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org *within three weeks* of the deadline for the call.

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What happens after submission?

Milestones for the selection process of your grant application are given below; *please note the dates given are approximate and for guidance only*. Find out more about the assessment process on our [website](). You will be contacted by email when your applicant response is due, or if there are any other actions you need to take; these will all be done via your online account.

Milestone	Date
Lay Research Panel read the plain English application. Changes will be requested if it is too technical.	Late February/early March
You will be invited to respond to the peer reviewers' comments.	Late March – Mid-April
Applications triaged. Members of the Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Panel will review the applications. Shortlisted applications will be taken forward for further consideration.	April-May
The plain English application will be discussed at the meeting of our Lay Research Panel. Separately, the scientific application, together with its reviews and your responses to them, will be discussed at the annual meeting of our Medical Research Committee. Both groups will score the applications, and the final recommendation about which proposals are fundable will be made at the Medical Research Committee meeting, with input from the Lay Research Panel.	June
Notification of outcome- you will be notified of the outcome of your application after our Finance Committee/Board of Trustees has met to make the final decision.	Mid-July
Formal outcome letter - you will receive a formal letter (by email) with the outcome of your application and feedback from the Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Panel.	Late July/early August

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

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