



DFID/ESRC/MRC/Wellcome Trust Health Systems Research Initiative

Application Guidance: Outline proposals for Health Systems Research Grants

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1. Call 5 timeline

Please note that the timeline for Foundation grants for Call 5 is slightly different to in previous years, with the application deadline in June 2018, and decisions made in October 2018. The timeline for Outline and Full Research Grants follows the same process as in previous years. A breakdown of key dates for both application types can be found below:

Outline and Full Research Grant Timeline

- Outline Grant Call opens: 8th November 2017
- Outline Grant Call deadline: 30th January 2018
- Invitation to submit full proposals: April 2018
- Deadline for full proposals: June 2018
- PI response to reviewers' comments: September 2018
- Full stage panel meeting: October 2018

Foundation Grant Timeline

- Foundation Call opens on Je-S: 7th March 2018
- Foundation Call deadline: 5th June 2018
- Foundation Call panel meeting: October 2018

2. Important Outline Grant application information

Research Grants are focused projects usually up to 3 years' duration with a maximum of 5 years in duration. There are no set budget limits; small and larger-scale projects are invited. As a guide, applicants should note that approximately £4m is available for Research Grants under this call and the funders would like to fund 5-10 projects.

MRC administers the call for proposals on behalf of the funders and so all applications should be submitted to the MRC and will be awarded according to MRC Terms and Conditions. Funding for projects awarded under this call for proposals is jointly provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Wellcome Trust (WT).

General information about how to apply to the MRC can be found in the MRC Guidance for Applicants:

<https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/>

Where guidance in the present document differs from that in the MRC Guidance for Applicants, you should follow the directions in this scheme specific document.

The submission deadline for Outline applications is:

16:00 GMT Tuesday 30th January 2018.

All projects must have a Principal Investigator based at either a UK Research Organisation (RO) or an RO in a Low/Middle Income Country. It will be the ROs hosting the successful PIs that receive the funding and manage distribution of the funding to any Co-Investigator RO. PI's from High Income Countries outside the UK are not eligible to apply for this scheme.

The application/review process in summary:

1. Outline Grant application deadline: 16:00 GMT Tuesday 30th January 2018
2. Panel meeting of academic experts: late March 2018
3. Successful applications will be notified and given Panel feedback in April 2018 to be incorporated into full applications with a deadline for Mid-June
4. Applications will be sent out for external peer review and the applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to those comments before a final Panel meeting in October 2017
5. Decisions to be relayed in early November 2018

Queries should be sent to:

Jessica Dixon, MRC Global Health Funding Officer,

HSRI@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

+44 (0) 1793 416437

3. Who can apply?

This programme allows academics from developing and developed countries to work together in partnerships that build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship.

The intellectual challenge should be the determining factor when configuring appropriate partnerships and collaborations. Proposals must demonstrate meaningful quality collaborations or partnerships, demonstrated through clear leadership roles across the proposed partnership, and balance and proportionality in partners' roles, responsibilities and costs.

Principal Investigators

This call differs from the standard MRC rules as for this call Principal Investigators can be based either in the UK (as per usual MRC rules) or in a low- or middle-income country (LMIC).

The PI's are responsible for the intellectual leadership of the research project and for the overall management of the research. The PI will be the funding agencies' main contact for the proposal.

Projects with Principal Investigators (P-Is) from LMICs are strongly encouraged and all proposals must include Co-Investigators from the LMIC in which the research is taking place. Funding is not dependent on the involvement of a UK-based research organisation. Applicants without experience of UK funding are encouraged to seek mentorship or guidance on grant writing from colleagues with experience of winning UK funding.

For administrative purposes when completing the Je-S form, you will only be able to list one PI. While there is formally only one PI, you can make it clear in your Case for Support that the scientific leadership is shared and that in this respect, the applicants listed are co-principle investigators.

It is not permitted for the same person to be Principal Investigator on any more than two proposals submitted to this call.

Co-Investigators (Co-Is)

The PI's may be supported by a number of Co-I's named on the application. A Co-I assists the PI in the management and leadership of the research project.

All UK and International PI's and Co-I's must have verified Je-S Accounts and must be added to the Je-S form under "Co-Investigator". Please see section 6 'creating a Je-S account' for information on how to add an organisation on Je-S.

Other support

For information on other parties involved in research e.g. Project Partners, please see section 1 in the [Guidance for Applicants and Award Holders](#).

Research Organisation Eligibility

Principal Investigator's MUST be based at one of the following:

- Higher Education Institutions
- Independent Research Organisations (IRO)
- UK Government Funded Organisations (other than MRC funded Units and Institutes)
- MRC Units/Institutes
- University Units (former MRC Units)

For researchers based in [low- or middle-income countries](#), eligible institutions include higher education institutions and non-profit research institutions.

Many non-UK institutions and some UK organisations will not currently be recognised to hold UK Research Council grants. Lead institutions which are not recognised to hold UK Research Council grants will have to obtain Research Council recognition before any grant can be confirmed. In order to minimise administrative burdens and costs to both applicants and Research Council staff, formal recognition will only be pursued if the grant is successful.

Further information on the RCUK's eligibility for research funding see:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>

If you are unsure about your organisation's eligibility, please consult the Programme Manager, by contacting: HSRI@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

4. Essential documents for Outline Grant applications

Only applications submitted through Je-S will be recognised: (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>)

Applications must be submitted by the PI on behalf of the Research team. Outline Applications must include the following PDF/Word attachments:

- A completed application form on Je-S: All investigators **MUST** be included. This form reflects the project costs so please include **ALL** costs, UK or otherwise. See 'Costs' section for further clarification.
- A jointly prepared Outline Case for Support (see additional guidance below)
- CV's and publication lists uploaded individually for all named investigators

There is scheme specific guidance for the Case for Support that is outlined below. Further guidance and details for all of the other above content can be found in the [Guidance for Applicants and Award Holders](#).

All attachments should be completed in 11 point Arial typeface, with a minimum of 2cm margins. Applications will not be accepted where smaller or narrow typefaces have been used. If you exceed the maximum page length or attach extraneous documents, we may reject your application or return your application to you for amendment.

Page lengths (A4 size):

Joint Health Systems Research Initiative Outline applications for	Maximum No of Pages
Case for Support	4 (plus 2 page for references)
CV's	2 (pages per investigator)
Publications	1 (page per investigator)
Letters of Support	2
References	2

At the outline stage you do not need to submit a Justification for Resources, a Pathways to Impact statement or a Data Management Plan, these will only be required to be completed by successful outline applicants, when they submit to stage two of the call.

The online Je-S form requests information such as administrative details of the investigators, financial information and summaries of your research. We recommend that applicants access the Je-S form well in advance of the deadline so that they can see the specific information that they will need to enter and can ensure that they and their co-investigators are registered on the system. It is fine to copy information between your pdf attachments and the Je-S form where there is overlap in information requested.

5. Case for Support scheme specific guidance

Your Case for Support is a document including your scientific proposal, details of the research environment, people involved and references. Your Case for Support should indicate how your proposal fits the call specification for this scheme. Please use the following headings:

1. Research Project summary information

- Full title of the project (no more than 150 characters)
- In which country(ies) will the project take place
- Duration in months
- Total amount requested from this funding scheme
- Principal health systems research question to be addressed

2. Health Systems relevance and importance: why is this research needed now and in this proposed location?

What evidence is there that the answer to your research question is needed and wanted by relevant users, for instance, policy-makers, research users and decision makers.

Please consider issues such as burden of disease and priority for local, regional and national health systems and how this research will strengthen local health systems. Proposals must outline why the research is important to the particular LMIC context and engage with context specific academic and non-academic stakeholders. You must demonstrate knowledge of relevant health systems empirical literature, particularly from low and middle income countries where relevant and propose how this research may contribute to this literature. Please ensure that the proposal clearly addresses a health system research question rather than, for example, only evaluating the effects of a specific health service intervention.

3. Theoretical Framework

Please describe how your research questions and methodologies are embedded within a suitable theoretical framework with reference to relevant scholarly literature. This framework could draw from any of the appropriate disciplines (economics, sociology, anthropology, political science etc.) and should demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to your research focus. Where appropriate, proposals should also outline what contribution this research will make to an advance in theoretical knowledge.

4. Project and methodology description

Please describe your proposed research project, ensuring that you cover the following points:

- Where will the research take place?
- Who will the research participants be and why?
- What questions will be addressed and what are your research plans to address those questions?
- What pilot or preliminary information do you have available to help the panel assess the feasibility of the proposed study? Costly and complex studies are welcome but applicants should ensure that research questions remain tight and focused and that a potential Panel would be confident any large study could be managed effectively in the field.
- If you are testing delivery of an intervention, please be clear about what that intervention will consist of and why. How would delivery of the intervention relate to the broader health system and contribute to health systems strengthening.
- Consider how the findings from the proposed study, especially if it has a single disease focus, may inform work on other related conditions or diseases.
- If the research involves data collection or acquisition you must demonstrate that you have carried out a datasets review, and explicitly state why currently available datasets are inadequate for the proposed research.
- What is the proposed timeline?
- How will you evaluate the outcomes of the study?

Research project team

How does the team of investigators incorporate the range of discipline and experience necessary to carry out the study? To what extent is this application led and/or informed by LMIC researchers? Please ensure budget breakdowns between high income and LMIC researchers are appropriate with the aims of the scheme.

Methodology

Give details of the methodological approaches, study design and techniques that will be used. Particular care should be taken to explain any innovation in the methodology or where you intend to develop new methods. The use of qualitative methodology is welcomed where appropriate but researchers should take care to ensure that this is sufficiently detailed and justified. Applicants must ensure that the proposed methodology is appropriate to addressing their research questions and that any countries of focus are well justified. The panel will take a broad view of appropriate methodologies proposed to conduct systems based research.

If your methodology is an RCT, please contact HSRI@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk to discuss the eligibility of your study for this scheme. While RCT's are accepted it will be important to demonstrate how your proposed work is embedded in and relates to the wider health system in the proposed context. Applicants should note that the MRC, DFID and the Wellcome Trust currently fund a scheme for randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in LMICs. For further information please visit the webpage for this scheme:

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/browse/joint-global-health-trials-scheme-launch-of-sixth-call-for-proposals/>

5. Capacity building

Please outline any plans for capacity building including:

- Co-design of research;
- Implementation field-based research methods training for developing country partner staff;
- Opportunities for developing country partner staff to author/co-author journal and conference papers
- Opportunities for developing country partner staff to participate in national and international conferences.

Successful proposals will also demonstrate a strong understanding of the local research context and ensure the research programme does not undermine local research capacity.

6. Research impact: How will the results of this study be used?

- What changes might be implemented as a result of the study?
- Who will make those changes happen and how?
- Might the results be generalizable beyond the immediate research setting?
- Please describe how this research will engage with in-country actors such as

academic and non-academic stakeholders and policy makers. Research engagement strategies should reflect stakeholder priorities and any interventions that require government buy-in should demonstrate engagement with public sector actors.

7. Ethics

It is essential that applicants describe the ethical considerations that have informed the proposed research. Details of the ethical review and research governance arrangements that would apply to the proposal must be described.

8. Financial Information

- Are other funding partners involved? Who are the partners and what is the status of the discussions?
- In addition to the costings you have provided on Je-S, please provide a breakdown of the funding request per institution using the below table.

Organisation name	Total project costs (GBP)	Total cost requested from this scheme (GBP)*

9. Proposal History

Has an application for funding for this project been submitted previously to DFID, ESRC, MRC, the Wellcome Trust or another funding organisation? If so, please indicate the status of the previous application. If your project has been previously submitted to DFID, ESRC, MRC or Wellcome Trust please contact the MRC in advance of submission to request approval for a resubmission. Please include in your e-mail a description of how you have revised the project design since your last submission, and, if you previously received feedback, please include a response to each feedback point.

6. Assessment Criteria

General information on the MRC's approach to peer review is provided in the MRC Guidance for Applicants document.

The assessment panel for this scheme will consider whether outline applications are of world-class standard (being intellectually innovative, well-focused and methodologically sound), and whether the research has the potential to make real improvement to health in low and middle income countries.

Peer reviewers and Panel members will be asked to comment on the following criteria in assessing the outline proposals:

Research Quality

- Scientific Rationale: novelty, importance and timeliness of the research and whether

- this is likely to lead to new understanding;
- Has the proposal outlined a need and justification for the proposed research area and situated the work within an existing body of literature?
 - Has the proposal demonstrated engagement with relevant theoretical frameworks?

Impact

- Will this research generate evidence on how to strengthen and improve health systems for people living in LMICs?
- Has this research used a health systems approach to inform the delivery of evidence-based interventions or structural changes? Proposals must demonstrate how interventions relate to and affect wider elements of a health system such as governance, financing, health workforce, information systems, service delivery etc.
- Will this research provide evidence that is of direct relevance to decision makers and practitioners in the field?
- Has the proposal identified potential barriers to uptake of the research outcomes in the setting and proposed plans to overcome these?
- Has this proposal identified key factors relevant to the potential scalability of the research?

Research Management and People

- The suitability of the investigator group including track record(s) of the individuals in their field(s) and whether they are best-placed to deliver the proposed research.
- How have team members from different disciplines been included and how has their variety of input been embedded in the approach to research?
- The management strategy proposed, including equitable access to any shared resources and sufficient capability and time commitments of senior staff to steer and oversee the research.
- Links with local research/health institutions and involvement of investigators from LMIC countries;
- Have opportunities for research capacity building been embedded into research plans?

Methodology

- The feasibility of experimental plans, statistics, methodology and design, including provision of sample size calculations, strategies to avoid bias, and preliminary data where appropriate;
- Is the design of the study appropriate to answer the question?
- Is the timeline realistic and achievable?
- Has the methodology been underpinned by a relevant theoretical or conceptual framework.

Ethics

- Comments on ethical and/or research governance issues, including whether proposed research is ethically acceptable and the appropriateness of ethical review and research governance arrangements.

Data Management Plan

- Is there is a sound plan for managing the research data, taking into account the types, scale and complexity of data being (or to be) managed and also the likely long-term value for further research including by sharing data.

Resources Requested

- Does the proposed research demonstrate good value for money?
- Are the funds requested essential and justified by the importance and scientific potential of the research?

7. Creating a Je-s account

All proposals submitted to this scheme are required to include investigators based in the low or middle income country where the research will take place.

All Overseas Research Organisations/Institutes and individual applicants (Principal and Co-Investigators), are required to be registered on the Je-S system.

Therefore, both UK organisations and overseas organisations are encouraged to contact the Je-S helpdesk at least two weeks before the call deadline of the 30th January 2018, so we can ensure that the overseas organisation (either Lead or Non-lead), has been correctly added to the Je-S System. Any delays could mean the proposal being rejected because of late submission.

Please login to your Je-S account using the username and password you have chosen (if you do not have a Je-S account, or have forgotten your password, please see the guidance provided further below). <https://jes.rcuk.ac.uk/JeS2WebLoginSite/Logout.aspx>

- New Je-S Users: In order to gain access to the Je-S System, [Create an Account](#).
- Je-S users having problems successfully completing login to their Je-S account: [Retrieve User Name / Password](#).
- Select '**Documents**' from left hand menu list from your Je-S account home page
- Select '**New Document**' from within the Functions/create section of your documents page

Creating your Je-S application:

- Select Council: **MRC**
- Select Document Type: **Outline Proposal**
- Select Scheme: **MRC Jointly Funded Initiatives Outline**
- Select Call/Type/Mode (optional): **Joint Health Systems Research Initiative Outline Jan 2018**
- Select '**Create Document**' option

Je-S Add New Document

To find the council, document type and scheme combination for a particular call please use the call search.

Call Search (opens in a new window)

Select Council:

MRC ▼

Select Document Type:

Outline Proposal ▼

Select Scheme:

MRC Jointly Funded Initiatives Outline ▼

Select Call/Type/Mode (optional):

Joint Health Systems Research Initiative Outline Jan 2018 ▼

Copy existing document?

Create Document Cancel

Please telephone Je-S Helpdesk on: 01793 444164 should you require any assistance with the Je-S System.

Please complete the administrative, summary and financial information as requested by the online Je-S form. The following information provides guidance on specific sections of the Je-S form which we note that applicants frequently required further assistance with.

Entering costs in Je-S

UK research will be funded at 74% of the Full Economic Cost (FEC). Research incurred by overseas ROs and investigators is eligible to be funded at 100% of FEC. Please see section 5. Resources – Full Economic Costing in the [Guidance for Applicants and Award Holders](#) for information on FEC.

Funding for non-UK research institutions that have not previously received funding from MRC will be dependent on further eligibility and financial checks, to be conducted if the proposal is selected for funding. For further advice on eligibility, please contact HSRI@headoffice.co.uk

Funding available:

Costs	Funding available
Research costs:	
Staff – directly incurred post	Yes
Staff – directly allocated posts (PI and Co-I time)	Yes
Other research costs (including equipment, consumables)	Yes
Studentships (PhD)	No

Travel and subsistence for exchange/mobility activities	Yes
Cost of workshops, meetings etc.	Yes

Please note that research teams should consider the breakdown of budgets between UK/high income costs and LMIC project costs keeping in mind the aims of the call.

Direct (salary) Costs:

Lead/Principal Investigators (PI's) & Co-investigators (Co-I's), can be based in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), as per usual MRC funding rules. LMIC PI's & Co-I's can claim 100% of their direct costs (direct costs = the total salary costs for each 'Investigator'). These costs should be entered as Exceptions and claimed at 100%.

Indirect (infrastructure) Costs:

MRC will also allow overseas institutions to request a maximum of 20% indirect costs as a contribution to the overseas institution infrastructure cost's that would be incurred by the overseas organisation hosting the project. These indirect costs are calculated by adding all Investigator direct costs together and dividing this total cost requested by 5 (to calculate the 20% total).

Example (LMIC institution indirect costs):

Overseas Lead Investigator (PI), total salary costs for the project = £20,000
 Overseas Co-Investigator (1), total salary costs for the project = £15,000
 Overseas Co-Investigator Travel & Subsistence + Fieldwork costs = £15,000

With all these above overseas costs being requested as 'Exceptions' (100%), the total costs claimed would equal £50,000. 20% of these total costs would equal £10,000 indirect costs.

MRC will expect these indirect costs to be requested as 'Exceptions' (100%), and detailed within the 'Other Directly Incurred Costs' section of the Je-S form (please note that all costs requested on the Je-S form are required to be should be broken down and fully justified within the Justification for Resources document to be attached to the Je-S application form).

Co-investigators (Co-Is)

Co-investigators can be based in the UK as per usual MRC funding rules or in low- and middle-income countries as per usual MRC funding rules. LMIC Co-I's can claim 100% of their direct costs and up to 20% of costs as indirect costs (for further guidance on these direct and indirect costs, please see the detailed guidance above).

Co-investigators can be based in high-income countries outside of the UK as per usual MRC funding rules. They can claim 100% of their direct costs but no indirect costs. However, as the scheme is intended to fund work in low- and middle-income countries, high-income country applicants are advised to keep their costs claimed to a minimum.

Costing guidelines

For overseas PI's and Co-I's all travel and subsistence costs can be claimed at 100%. UK based researchers can only claim 74%, even if they are travelling to a LMIC for the project.

For overseas institutions, all other exceptional costs associated with the overseas

organisation should be claimed under the appropriate fund heading as “exceptions” and entered as “Other Directly Incurred Costs”. These include consumables, consultancy fees, field work fees, equipment (under (£10,000) and subcontracting.

Indirect and Estates Costs cannot be claimed by investigators in a high-income country based outside of the UK.

If any of the investigators want to enter time allocated to the grant that they will actually spend on the project which could be different from the actual costs worked, this should be specified as there is a separate section for hours worked and hours charged in the budget. This can be found on the investigator section in the main document menu in Je-S.

Project Partner/s

A Project Partner is an organisation or individual who is providing substantial contribution to the project and will not take any funds out of the project. Therefore, any persons already named on the proposal (E.G. as PI, Co-I or Named Researcher), should NOT also be included as a Project Partner.

For further guidance please see the MRC Guidance for applicants at <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/>