

MRC population cohorts outline application. Guidance for applicants and outline application template

Guidance for applicants

Outline applications are required for all requests for funding for population cohorts¹, whether the proposal is for an entirely new cohort or the renewal of support for an existing study (e.g. for a new round of data collection).

Applications should be made in terms of the overall scientific impact and strategic need of the cohort; and in the context of existing national and international studies. Applicants can refer to the MRC strategic review: [Maximising the value of UK population cohorts](#) and the online [MRC Cohort Directory](#), but should also make sure they are familiar with relevant existing international investments.

Outline applications should not exceed 6 sides of A4 (10 point) including references. You are encouraged to append a 1-page diagram to clarify the coordination of key activities and milestones (e.g. Gantt chart, flow chart) and an additional page is allowed for the table of data sharing metrics (see 9.6). In addition, please attach a 1 page CV for each of the investigators.²

Outline applications will be reviewed by the MRC Cohort Strategic Review Group against the following criteria:

1. Will the proposal meet a strategic need that could not be met by existing national and international cohorts or other relevant data?
2. Will the proposed study design fulfil the strategic need described?
3. *For existing cohorts:* what the likely impact of the additional investment will be. In part, this assessment will be based on whether the cohort is a valuable resource for the wider scientific community and whether metrics on data access/sharing and the profile of outputs, such as publications arising from the study, support this.
4. *For new cohorts:* whether the new cohort will be a valuable and accessible resource for the wider scientific community.

If the CSRG recommend submission of a full application it is expected that the proposal should normally be submitted within 3 months of the approval. If this is not possible (for example, because of the nature of the feedback) please discuss with the appropriate MRC Programme Manager as soon as possible.

Applicants are asked to note that:

- The invitation to submit a full proposal expires after 12 months, whereupon a new outline submission will be required.
- Applicants will not be able to resubmit rejected applications for 12 months.

¹ Where the population under study may be defined by: geographical area, occupation or other setting, age range, gender, ethnic group, socioeconomic status, etc. Populations based on clinical criteria are specifically excluded from this process.

² CV to include: current post, academic and employment history, educational qualifications, up to five key research publications.

Outline application template

Outline applications should be structured using the headings listed below.

1. Title of the cohort

2. Principal Investigator

Name, affiliation, contact details

3. Co-Investigators and environment

Name individual co-investigators and collaborators and outline the role they will play in the cohort study. Explain how the study team are well qualified to carry out the proposed activity. Describe the environment in which the research will take place or the infrastructure that will be developed or maintained.

4. Cohort information

Provide information on the study population, including sample size, age range, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. Details of the recruitment method, length of follow up and the follow up schedule should be provided.

5. Type of request

What type of funding is being requested – is it for a new cohort or for continued funding of an existing cohort? Is the funding intended to support on-going running of the cohort (including routine data collection/sweeps) or is it to conduct a specific scientific study?

6. Scientific potential and importance

Explain the distinctive scientific importance of the proposed data collection activity or new cohort, highlighting:

- 6.1. Specific scientific questions that will be addressed as part of the application or, where no specific research question is being addressed and funding is to support routine data collection, scientific questions that could be addressed by the cohort over the next 5-10 years.
- 6.2. Explain why these scientific questions could not be answered using existing national or international cohorts and data sources.
- 6.3. *For existing cohorts:*
 - 6.3.1. If a new data sweep is planned, justify why the proposed timing is important in scientific terms.
 - 6.3.2. Show follow-up rates and attrition clearly from initiation to the most recent data collection. If data are collected through multiple methods (e.g. mail/internet questionnaire, hands-on clinic assessment, record linkage) show coverage and attrition for each of these separately.
 - 6.3.3. Justify how continued support will add value and enable new research that couldn't be done using the existing resource, or other existing national/international data sources.
- 6.4. Include details of any plans to collaborate with other existing cohorts.

7. Impact

For new cohorts, provide details of the unique scientific niche that the study will occupy. If there are similar cohorts nationally or internationally you should explain the added value of this proposal.

For existing cohorts, provide:

- 7.1. The three to five most important outputs over the previous funding period (normally 5 years); these could include scientific, policy or capacity-building-related impacts.
- 7.2. Publications, including the proportion generated outside of the lead institution(s).
- 7.3. Details of cohort assets, i.e. biosamples and data (including linkages with routine data); these may be included in an annex or as a reference to a website if these are clearly documented.

8. Proposed work

Outline the proposed study or activities to be undertaken, giving sufficient methodological information to show that the aims are feasible. Including, as relevant:

- 8.1. Study design and methodology, including the number and type of participants (with a justification) and inclusion criteria.
- 8.2. Data and biological samples to be collected with broad details, e.g. via questionnaire, record linkage or clinic assessment, and methods for biosample collection.
- 8.3. Anticipated duration of follow-up.
- 8.4. Resources or facilities to be developed, used or maintained.
- 8.5. Management arrangements.
- 8.6. Transition plan, if the cohort is moving from collection to curation, including issues such as attrition and consent.

9. Access, curation and sharing

- 9.1. Describe the proposed principles of the governance arrangements and processes for access, curation and sharing of data and/or samples, clarifying how these comply with [MRC policy](#).
- 9.2. Please indicate in precise terms how the cohort can be “discovered” by other scientists.
- 9.3. Please explain who makes decisions on access, and what the criteria and conditions are.
- 9.4. Please set out the time frame from data/sample generation to new data and samples being made available to the wider research community.
- 9.5. Please indicate the long term plans by which the asset will be curated to ensure value is maximised and sustained to recognised standards.
- 9.6. The MRC considers it important that cohort data are made widely available to the research community and it will monitor this for funded cohorts.

[New from 2017] For existing cohorts only please include the following table about data usage over the last 5 years, counting the current year as year ‘0’.

This is to help MRC to assess the potential added value from funding this renewal.

Please copy the table below into your application and populate this as appropriate.

Metric to be provided	Previous 5 years from (<i>add date</i>)				
	-4	-3	-2	-1	Now
Number of applications to access existing cohort data					
Number of applications approved					
Median time and range (in days) for access committee decisions*					
Median time and range (in days) for releasing the data*					
Where appropriate, the number of applications to use depletable biological samples					
Number of approvals for the use of depletable samples					
Median time and range (in days) between submission of application and transfer of samples*					
Number of applications to add new data to the resource					
Number of the above applications that were approved					

*The timing of requests should start when a formal approach is made.

Please ensure that all the approved studies are posted on the cohort's web site so that data requests, and research projects, are not unknowingly duplicated.

10. Sustainability

How many further data/sample collections are anticipated beyond the funding term requested? When is it projected that on-going support for the cohort will be for routine data linkage and maintenance costs only?

11. Resources Requested

Include details of:

- 11.1. The estimated cost of the proposal and the duration of the proposal
- 11.2. The resources that are needed and what proportion of the estimated cost will be used for de novo data and sample collection and storage. The resources and proportion of costs that will be for the maintenance of new and existing samples and data.
- 11.3. If relevant, the resources and proportion of the overall cost of the application that are being requested for new analysis and research.
- 11.4. Whether other funders are contributing to the cohort costs. If so, who are they, what element of the study does their contribution fund and over what time period?

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