



DFID/ESRC/MRC/Wellcome

Health Systems Research Initiative (HSRI)

Application Guidance: Foundation Grant

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1. HSRI Call 6 Overview

Timeline

A breakdown of key dates can be found below:

- Foundation Grant call opens on Je-S: **Thursday 7th March 2019**
- Foundation Grant application deadline: **16:00 BST Thursday 30th May 2019**
- Panel meeting of academic experts: **October 2019**
- Successful applications receive funding **November/December 2019***

*subject to relevant ethical and financial approvals.

Important information

We anticipate that Foundation Grants will have a duration of no longer than 24 months, the size of a grant may vary but a general guideline would be up to £200,000 FEC. However, grants exceeding this value will still be considered if the costs are fully justified. The purpose of a Foundation Grant is to conduct preliminary studies needed before a Research Grant proposal can be designed or to explore innovative health systems topics, under researched areas or creative approaches that have the potential to be developed further.

MRC administers the call for proposals on behalf of the funders, 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 Wellcome.

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/>

It is important to note 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 Foundation Grant applications is: 16:00 BST Thursday 30th May 2019. We advise that have your proposal completed at least 48 hours before the deadline. To allow time for your research organisation to approve your proposal via the submitters pool. Please speak to your research organisation prior to submission to ensure you are aware of internal processes.

Foundation Grants will be assessed at the panel meeting in October 2019 and awards will be issued shortly after this date.

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

Queries should be sent to: HSRI@mrc.ukri.org

2. 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 (PIs)

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).

See section [1.3.1 The principal investigator](#) of the Guidance for Applicants for further details.

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 PIs from LMICs are strongly encouraged and all proposals must include Co-Is from the LMIC in which the research is taking place. Funding is not dependent on the involvement of a UK-based research organization.

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-Principal Investigators.

It is not permitted for the same person to be PI 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.

See section [1.3.2 Co-investigator](#) of the Guidance for Applicants for further details.

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.

Project partners

A project partner provides a substantial intellectual contribution to the project, and their organisation may also provide resources either in-kind or financially, **project partners are not expected to request MRC funding to participate**. The contribution and involvement of project partners should be acknowledged in the project partner section of the application form and described in detail in the case for support, where the whole team and their skills/expertise and responsibilities should be set out for the benefit of assessors.

Please note:

- Project partners do not need to be based at an eligible RO or have a verified Je-S account.
- Each project partner must provide a letter of support.
- If the project partner is from industry, applicants must follow the guidance relating to the MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement (MICA). The level of contribution expected from the industrial partner depends on the intellectual property arrangements between the academic and industrial partners. Please refer to [MICAs](#) for further information.

Subcontractors

Please note the role of a subcontractor is distinct from a project partner. Subcontractors should not be named as part of the project team. They carry out a specific piece of work on behalf of the investigators on a fee-for-service basis, with no potential claim as an inventor over any arising intellectual property (IP). Details of any subcontracts should be specified in the Case for Support and fully justified in the Justification of Resources.

Research Organisation Eligibility

UK PIs 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)

LMIC PIs MUST be based at:

- Higher education institutions
- 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 recognition before any grant can be confirmed. To minimise administrative burdens and costs to both applicants and staff, formal recognition will only be pursued if the grant is successful.

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

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>

If you are unsure about your organisation's eligibility, please consult the Programme Manager, by contacting: HSRI@mc.ukri.org

3. Essential documents for Foundation 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. Foundation Grant Applications must include the following PDF/Word attachments:

- A completed application on Je-S: All investigators MUST be included. This form reflects the project costs so please include ALL costs, UK and overseas. See ‘Costs’ section below for further clarification.
- A jointly prepared Case for Support (see additional guidance below)
- CV’s and publication lists uploaded individually for all named investigators
- [Justification of resources](#) for the total costs requested for the project
- [Pathways to Impact](#)
- [Data Management Plan](#)
- Signed letter(s) of support

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](#).

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, font size 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 Foundation Grants	Maximum No of Pages
Case for Support	4 (plus 1 page for references)
Justification of Resources	2
CV’s	2 (pages per investigator)
Publications	1 (page per investigator)
Letters of Support	2 (pages per letter)
Pathways to Impact	2
Data Management Plan	3 (4 for longitudinal studies)

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-Is 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.

4. Case for Support scheme specific guidance

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

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 LMICs 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.

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.

Project and methodology description

1. If your Foundation Grant is intended to obtain information needed to undertake a well-informed full-scale research project, it is essential that you clearly articulate how this Foundation Grant will lead to specific further research and why this would be important.
2. If your research intends to explore possible health system innovations, under-researched areas or creative approaches that have the potential to be developed further, proposals should also either have practical applications or, for conceptual proposals, be able to demonstrate their potential for practical application.

Foundation Grant holders will not be automatically awarded funds for a full-scale research project upon completion of their grant.

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

- What specific questions will be addressed by the Foundation Grant? Enough detail must be given to show why the research is likely to be competitive in its field.

- Who are the target populations?
- 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. Please describe why your proposed methodology is the most appropriate and innovative way of addressing the research question. The use of qualitative methodology is welcomed where appropriate, but researchers should take care to ensure that this is sufficiently detailed and justified. The panel will take a broad view of appropriate methodologies proposed to conduct systems-based research.

If your methodology is a randomised control trial (RCT), please contact HSRI@mrc.ukri.org 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 addresses health system strengthening in the proposed context and potentially more broadly. Applicants should note that the MRC, DFID and the Wellcome Trust currently fund a scheme for RCTs in LMICs. For further information visit the webpage for this scheme:

<https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/science-areas/international-and-global-health-research/funding-partnerships/joint-global-health-trials/>

Capacity building

Please outline any plans for capacity building including:

- Co-design of research;
- Research methods training for LMIC staff;
- Opportunities for LMIC staff to author/co-author journal and conference papers;
- Opportunities for LMIC 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.

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 generalisable 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.

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.

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)*

* Costs incurred by UK institutions and investigator costs are calculated at 74% of the Full Economic Costs (FEC). Costs incurred by overseas ROs and investigators are 'Exceptions' and can be claimed at 100%.

Proposal history

Has an application for funding for this project been submitted previously to DFID, ESRC, MRC, Wellcome 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 you must contact the MRC in advance of submission to request approval for a resubmission.

5. Assessment criteria

The following criteria will be used by the Panel in assessment of the applications:

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 is 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 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?

6. The Je-S submission

Creating a Je-S account

All proposals submitted to this scheme are required to include investigators based in the LMIC 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 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://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>

- 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: **Standard Proposal**
- Select Scheme: **MRC Jointly Funded Initiatives Full**
- Select Call/Type/Mode (optional): **Joint Health Systems Research Initiative Foundation Grant June 2019**
- 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:
Standard Proposal

Select Scheme:
MRC Jointly Funded Initiatives Full

Select Call/Type/Mode (optional):
Joint Health Systems Research Initiative Foundation Grant June 2019

Copy existing document?

Create Document Cancel

Please telephone Je-S Helpdesk 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). Costs incurred by overseas ROs and investigators are eligible to be funded at 100% of FEC. Please see section 3. [Resources – Full economic cost/Transparent approach to costing](#) of the guidance for applicants.

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@mrc.ukri.org

Funding available:

Costs	Funding available
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
Costs 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:

PI's and Co-I's can be based in LMICs. 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 – staff and claimed at 100%. UK based PI's and Co-I's please refer to [MRC Guidance for Applicants](#).

Indirect (infrastructure) Costs:

MRC will also allow LMIC institutions to request a maximum of 20% indirect costs as a contribution to the institution infrastructure cost's that would be incurred by the LMIC 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):

- LMIC PI total salary costs for the project = £20,000
- LMIC Co-I total salary costs for the project = £15,000
- LMIC Co-I travel and subsistence, fieldwork costs = £15,000

With all these above LMIC costs being requested as 'Exceptions' (100%), the total project 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-I can be based in the UK as per usual MRC funding rules or in LMICs as per usual MRC funding rules. LMIC Co-I's can claim 100% of their direct costs and up to a maximum of 20% indirect costs (for further guidance on these direct and indirect costs, please see the detailed guidance above).

Co-Is 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 LMICs, high-income country applicants are advised to keep their costs claimed to a minimum.

Costing guidelines

For LMIC PI's and LMIC/high income country 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 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.

Contact us

Again, it is important to note 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.

If you have any questions, please email us HSRI@MRC.UKRI.ac.uk