

## **Budget**

### **On average how many grants do you award each year? What should the approximate value of each award be?**

There is £4.7m available to fund a variety of both Foundation and Research Grants. We aim to spend approximately £4m on Research Grants and the remaining £0.7m on Foundation Grants. However, we have flexibility in our funding and will only fund proposals when the quality is high.

We do not prescribe the number of projects that will be funded each year, but instead base this upon the available budget and number of proposals deemed of high enough quality to be funded. Similarly, we do not prescribe an optimal budget per project, but expect the costs requested to be well justified and appropriate for the work to be conducted. Awards made through this scheme to date have ranged from £60k to £1m. Foundation grants should be up to £200k, however if you wish to go over this amount, please contact the office to discuss.

To see how many projects have been funded each year by the HSRI scheme, please see the HSRI [Call 7 webinar presentation](#) and [details of funded projects](#) on the HSRI webpage: <https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/browse/hsri-call-7/health-systems-research-initiative-call-7/>

### **Is the exact amount of budget awarded or could it be lower/higher depending on the quality of the proposal?**

Typically, awards are made in full, with exceptions costs (outside the UK) paid at 100% full economic costing (FEC) and UK research costs paid at 74% FEC.

If the Committee deems an aspect of the research as unnecessary, weak, or not good value for money, they may recommend funding the award on the condition that it is removed along with the associated budget.

### **What % of the funding can we use for purchasing equipment?**

Any single item over £10k is classified as equipment. There is no limit to the % of budget allocated to equipment, but all equipment should be carefully justified. Applicants are encouraged to contact the office prior to applying where equipment is to be included in a proposal. Please see section 3.2.2.2 of the MRC's Guidance for Applicants for further information on equipment costs: <https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/guidance-for-applicants/>

### **Who manages the project budget if awarded?**

Awards are made to the Principle Investigator's (PI) Research Organisation (RO), which can be based in a Low-or-Middle Income Country (LMIC) or the UK. This lead RO is responsible for the distribution of funding to any partners on the grant.

### **What is meant by 'Funding is available for research only; we will not fund the routine delivery of health services'?**

Funding from this scheme cannot be used to fund the routine delivery of health services. Where the research explores provision beyond what is routinely provided, costs can be included in the research proposal. However, there should also be consideration for who would pay for the additional costs if the research were to be successful and implemented in the future.

## **Proposal**

**For the outline stage (Research Grants only), what level of detail is needed in the application? Is there a template for the outline? What is the word limit for proposal?**

For guidance on writing a Research Grant outline application, please see the [scheme specific guidance](#).

Please follow the headings stipulated and answer the questions posed. There are page limits for each section of the proposal and strict guidance on font and text size/margins(see [page 4 of the Research Grant outline guidance document](#)).

The Case for Support must contain sufficient detail for the Committee to be able to clearly understand what you propose to do. Proposals lacking detail will not be funded.

**Should proposals include memoranda of understanding with government entities?**

As Health Systems research often relies on close links with policy makers and government bodies, it can be helpful to include Letters of Support within your application. This helps reviewers and the Committee to understand how important this research is to the stakeholders and how much support they offer to the research project.

However, the Committee are keen to establish that a Letter of Support does not necessarily explain the form that the stakeholder relationship will take. Details of how stakeholder engagement will happen, when and for what purpose should clearly be communicated within the Pathways to Impact or Case for Support (or both).

**Could you provide a sample proposal to clarify how the outline should be formatted?**

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide example proposals.

**Is a letter of intent needed for both types of grants?**

Please see the relevant guidance document for details of the required attachments. The inclusion of a cover letter is optional for both Research Grant outline stage and Foundation Grant proposals, unless it is a resubmission or an invited full Research Grant proposal where it is a requirement. (Please note that resubmissions need to be agreed with the office prior to applying).

**If I submit an outline application for a Research Grant that is not invited to the full stage, would it be considered for a foundation grant?**

As applications for the two different grants are distinct from each other, we unfortunately cannot transfer one grant type to another. If you wish to explore whether you can resubmit the proposal as a Foundation Grant proposal, please contact the office. Resubmissions are not accepted unless approved prior to applying.

**Can I submit more than one proposal? Can I apply for a Foundation Grant and Research Grant in the same year/call? How many proposals can a particular institution submit?**

An applicant may apply for both grant types in the same call (1 Foundation Grant and 1 Research Grant outline proposal), or 2 Foundation Grants, however it is not possible to apply for 2 Research Grants (i.e. submit 2 outlines to the same call).

There is no limit to the amount of proposals one particular institution can submit, however, we would expect the proposals to be distinct in nature and follow the above rules regarding PI submissions.

**What are the minimum qualifications for the Principal Investigator? Can a PhD candidate be the Principle Investigator in a team if they can prove their competency?**

We would expect applicants to this scheme to meet the standard MRC requirements to be a PI. MRC's [guidance for applicant's states](#):

*The minimum formal qualification required is a graduate degree, most applicants are also expected to have a PhD. Proposals from less experienced PIs should normally include a senior colleague as a Co-Investigator.*

If the PI is from an LMIC and has undertaken a less conventional career path, the requirement to hold a PhD may be flexed if they can demonstrate an ability to manage and conduct a large research project. In this scenario, we would recommend the researcher to contact [HSRI@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:HSRI@mrc.ukri.org) to confirm their eligibility.

**Can the proposal have two Principal Investigators?**

It is possible to include co-PI's in a proposal; their role and the management structure should be described in the Case for Support.

However, the Je-S system only allows for one PI to be named on the application, so one individual would have to be recorded as PI and one as a Co-PI. Please note, the PI is the lead correspondent and would therefore receive all communication from MRC. If awarded, the grant would be administered to the PI at their Research Organisation.

**Is it a requirement to include a UK-based researcher on the project? Can a LMIC country solely apply for this grant? Is it considered an advantage to have a UK-based researcher on the project?**

There is no requirement for a UK partner or researcher to be included in a proposal. The project team can entirely be led by LMIC researchers. The Committee do not consider the inclusion of a UK-based researcher as an advantage. The project team involved should be appropriate to the research proposed and incorporate necessary areas of expertise including geographical expertise, from relevant disciplines and from appropriate government bodies and partners.

**Can the proposal develop in two LIMICs?**

Cross country proposals are welcomed by the Committee. However, the application should include why these settings have been chosen and what the comparison between the two settings offers the research question.

**Can a for-profit research firm submit a proposal? Can the research team include Co-investigators from medical companies developing E-healthcare technologies?**

Private sector organisations cannot lead proposals or be included as Co-Investigators (Co-I's). Industrial or for-profit organisations can be included as industrial collaborators but would be not be able to draw any funds from the project. Please see the [MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement \(MICA\)](#) for further information.

**We have heard that private applicants are not eligible, does this extend to sub-grantees/partners at implementation?**

Sub-contracting to private sector organisations is allowed within a proposal and it is important to justify and explain their involvement clearly. 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.

**Please can you elaborate on what is meant by equal partnership in collaboration?**

All research proposals must demonstrate equitable partnerships between all the partners involved, in line with the UK Collaborative on Development Research '[Building Partnerships of Equals](#)' report. If the proposed project comprises of both High-Income Countries (HICs) and LMICs, part of the assessment process will be to consider how equal the partnership is across countries. The balance of intellectual and project management contributed by each partner, along with the proportion of budget going to the HIC vs. the LMIC will be assessed.

**Is there a link for a version in any other language for LIMCs to access?**

The working language of HSRI joint funders and Committee is English and unfortunately the application process is only available in this language. Applicants who would like to apply but see language as a barrier are encouraged to find mentorship to support them with their applications.

**Should a Foundation Grant have been conducted prior to a Research Grant in order to answer preliminary research questions?**

A Foundation Grant can be used to test out ideas and approaches that could be incorporated into a future larger research project. However, it is not always necessary for a Foundation Grant to have been conducted in advance, so long as the applicant can demonstrate that the project has been fully thought through and the project team are equipped with the necessary knowledge to conduct the project.

**Is the expected output publishing in a peer reviewed journal?**

Publishing in peer reviewed journals is one tool for communicating the outcomes of the research, however, this scheme expects impact beyond publications. The Pathways to Impact attachment (required at the full stage for Research Grants and for Foundation Grant proposals) should clearly describe the expected impact as well as how that will be achieved, for example, any stakeholder engagement that is planned as well as, when this will happen, how it will happen and why.

## **Remit**

### **Are there particular areas of health system research either in terms of disease burden or aspects of health system building blocks that this call prioritises over the others?**

Some of the gaps in the current portfolio of research funded through this scheme are highlighted in the example research questions on the call web page. The Committee particularly welcomes proposals addressing these questions, however the call is not limited to these. The call is particularly interested in research that address the system as a whole, rather than individual 'building blocks'. Proposals with a particular disease burden focus must make clear how they address system-wide issues, rather than being primarily disease-focussed.

### **Is eye health systems research in NCDs relevant for this call?**

Proposals focussing on eye health and non-communicable diseases are eligible for this scheme if they primarily focus on and address health systems questions.

### **Would a proposal exploring health system capacity (human/ structure/ flow) improvement interventions be eligible?**

Yes. Recognising that health systems are complex and multidimensional, this scheme welcomes research that identifies and addresses a range of health systems topics including but not limited to questions of governance, structure, institutions, social policy, health workforce, financing, private sector, civil society, information systems, products and technologies, supply chains, service delivery and so on.

### **Are proposals that include implementation science methodologies eligible for this scheme?**

Implementation science methodologies can be funded through HSRI if the methodology is used to answer a health systems research question. The Committee would like to emphasise that the project question and rationale should be decided first, and then the project team should consider what the most appropriate methodological approach is to answer the research question.

### **Public health grants tend to have a curative slant, are proposals related to wellbeing and disability inclusion within remit for the scheme?**

Proposals focussed on the translation of clinical interventions are not within the remit of the scheme, other funding routes are available for these types of proposal. This scheme is focussed on systems thinking and so welcomes proposals that consider system level barriers/interventions etc. that can be disease/health issue focussed where justified, as well as those that, for example, consider health system needs of people with disabilities.

### **Are the schemes open to participatory approaches? e.g. combining expertise of academics, citizens and various health care professionals?**

Yes. Participatory approaches and co-design of interventions are eligible for this scheme. Applicants should explain the value and relevance of the approach to the research question. Applicants should also think carefully about the overall scope of the work proposed; co-designing, implementing and evaluating a systems intervention may be too much work for the funding/timeframe. Proposals can also

focus on understanding the value and challenges of a co-design process itself, rather than only focussing on evaluating the output of a co-design process.

**Can you fund the evaluation of new policies that are designed to address the health of population groups across a health system?**

Yes. The scheme can fund the evaluation of new policies designed to address the health of a particular population but would prioritise studies in which the insights can be generalized to other groups or other parts of the health system. In addition, the scheme welcomes proposals researching the process of policy change.

**Will HSRI fund randomised control trials?**

HSRI has funded trials on occasion when the research question has been of relevance to health systems and the intervention is system level.

**Is your focus on primary studies only? Do you fund systematic reviews that address health system issues in LMICs?**

The Committee has no preference for utilising primary or secondary data. The Committee encourages the research team to think about what data is best placed to answer the research question and consider the advantages and disadvantages of the data source. Systematic reviews can form part of a wider research proposal; however, applicants should carefully justify why this work is not being conducted prior to applying to the scheme.

**Is a proposal that develops a solution for a health issue that exists in the UK as well as an LMIC eligible for this scheme?**

The aim of this scheme is to support research to improve the health of populations in LMICs and as such, the primary beneficiary of the research should be the LMIC involved in the project. If the proposal was able to demonstrate that the comparison between the LMIC and UK would be of an advantage to the LMIC, the proposal will be considered.

**Is there an ideal balance between experienced researchers and emerging researchers for capacity building?**

The joint funders do not stipulate an ideal balance of researchers for capacity building. The project team will be assessed on their ability to bring together a balance of expertise appropriate to answer the research question that is being posed. Opportunities for capacity building should then be explored to maximise the long-term benefit of the research proposal.

The Committee are keen to see project teams where there is both senior, experienced team members at the same time as providing opportunities for a new generation of researchers. However, senior members of the team should not be included for name-sake and should be contributing appropriately to the project.

Capacity strengthening should also be thought about carefully and fully, and integrated well with other activities, rather than being seen primarily as a set of standalone activities that support a one-way transfer from senior to emerging researchers, or from HIC to LMIC organisations/participants. A range of capacity strengthening activities can be considered moving beyond an individual focus to include, for example, efforts to strengthen organisational level activities - such as developing teaching materials for training programmes run by LMIC organisations or

strengthening LMIC organisational management systems or efforts to strengthen wider networks that engage a wide range of participants and allow for continued learning.

**Do you look at the relationship between collaborations such as co-publications?**

The scheme funds research projects building on existing collaborations as well as new collaborations. Each investigator's CV and publications will be reviewed as part of the assessment to ensure they bring appropriate expertise to execute the project effectively.

**How well are the recently graduated PhD's supported to initialise and lead a research proposal submitted for this health systems call?**

Early career researchers are welcome to apply for funding through this scheme. Part of the funding decision will be based on the project team and their capability to carry out the research effectively. Where early career researchers are involved, it can be helpful to describe the support structure in place within the research team to help with their development.