

MRC molecular and cellular medicine partnership grant: Sep 2021

Opportunity status:	Upcoming
Funders:	Medical Research Council (MRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Publication date:	22 March 2021
Opening date:	14 June 2021
Closing date:	1 September 2021 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 14 April 2021

You can apply for a partnership grant to support new partnerships between diverse groups of researchers in the area of molecular and cellular medicine.

Funding is available for between one and five years to:

- establish new, high-value collaborative activities or capabilities
- add value to high-quality scientific programmes that are already supported by grants from MRC and other funders.

Who can apply

Any UK-based researcher with an employment contract at an eligible research organisation can apply. You will need to:

- have at least a graduate degree, although we usually expect most applicants to have a PhD or medical degree
- show that you will direct the partnership and be actively engaged in the work.

You can include one or more industry partners as project partners in your application. International co-investigators can be included if they provide expertise

not available in the UK.

A principal investigator must lead the partnership. Any researchers you invite to become co-investigators must contribute to the academic leadership of the partnership.

You can find more details on eligibility in [**section one of our guidance for applicants \(MRC website\)**](#).

The focus of this funding opportunity is molecular and cellular medicine research. There are similar opportunities across [**other areas of medical research within our remit \(MRC website\)**](#) including:

- infections and immunity
- population and systems medicine
- neurosciences and mental health
- applied global health.

You can also apply for a partnership grant through the methodology research programme. There are also other types of awards including:

- research
- programmes
- partnerships.

You should contact us if you are not sure which opportunity to apply to.

What we're looking for

We fund partnerships working to transform our understanding of molecular and cellular medicine. Partnership grants are expected to support these research areas, although research itself is not supported through this route.

The Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board funds research into basic biological mechanisms or technologies relevant to human health and disease. We aim to increase understanding of:

- the structure and function of molecules and complexes
- the cellular environment during development and mature states
- how biological systems respond to challenges (for example, drugs and toxins) and diseases.

We lead MRC's investments in cancer, from fundamental discovery science to epidemiology, experimental medicine and early translation.

Research focused on specific organ systems or diseases (with the exception of cancer and haematology) is normally supported through our other research boards.

Research we fund includes, but is not limited to, the following areas:

- cell biology

- structural biology and biophysics
- molecular and functional genetics, epigenetics, genomics
- developmental and stem cell biology (excluding neurobiology)
- regenerative medicine
- molecular haematology
- development of new tools and technologies relevant to the Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board remit, such as nanotechnology, chemical biology and synthetic biology
- medical bioinformatics (including biostatistics, computational biology and systems biology)
- cancer
- toxicology and adverse health effects of environmental exposures
- pharmacology.

Find out more about [the science areas we support and our current board opportunity areas \(MRC website\)](#).

We encourage you to contact us first to discuss your application, especially if you believe your research may cross MRC research board or research council interests. If your application fits another research board remit better then we may decide to transfer it there to be assessed.

We will fund partnerships between diverse groups of researchers. These partnerships must:

- establish new, high-value collaborative activities or capabilities
- add value to high-quality scientific programmes that are already supported by grants from MRC and other funders.

We will not fund stand-alone, hypothesis-driven research projects which are eligible for MRC research or programme grant funding.

Collaborative activities can include:

- networking and partnership activities
 - establishing multidisciplinary collaborative partnerships or consortia
 - fostering and enabling a national and international strategy in this area
 - enabling knowledge sharing or creation across institutions.
- infrastructure support for establishing a unique shared resource or helping to exploit it – for example:
 - staff
 - systems
 - equipment
 - seminars
 - workshops.
- activities such as specialist data and software platforms or resources
- training, career development and capacity building in strategically important areas (this excludes fellowships but includes PhD studentships).

We may support small scale, pump-priming projects but your focus should not be on specific research questions. These should be interdisciplinary, high-risk and high-gain projects that would exemplify your partnership's novel capability

Successful partnership grants usually include a combination of these components. We will reject applications for funding only networking activities.

We expect partnership grants to reach maturity by the end of the initial award. You should find alternative ways of funding any follow-on activities.

Resource requests will vary between partnerships so we advise you to discuss this with the relevant programme manager before you apply.

Find the relevant programme manager (MRC website)

You can request funding for costs such as:

- a contribution to the salary of the principal investigator and key co-investigators (see details below)
- support for other posts such as research and technical
- consumables
- equipment
- travel costs
- data preservation, data sharing and dissemination costs
- estates or indirect costs.

We will not fund:

- standalone hypothesis-driven research projects
- funding to use as a 'bridge' between grants
- publication costs.

Investigators' salaries

If you are asking for funding to cover investigator time, you must:

- detail each named investigator's input
- justify why the partnership needs this time commitment.

Usually we will fund only the principal investigator and a small number of co-investigators. Other co-investigators may be involved without funding. We do not expect to fund project partners for participating in the partnership.

Research costs

You should request minimum resources for research. For example, we will support postdoctoral research positions only in exceptional cases. We may support technical posts if you can justify them.

You may use a partnership grant to buy equipment. You can also use it to cover the cost of essential infrastructure or to provide a platform for partnership activities.

We will fund the cost of working at an overseas research organisation if international collaboration is important to the success of your partnership. You must

discuss this with the programme manager before you apply.

Studentships

We do not expect studentships to form a major part of your application. You may include them only if you can show how the partnership will add value to the students' training experience. For example, through the unique environment your proposed partnership will create.

You should also consider how the studentships will add value and contribute towards the success of your partnership.

You must show why you cannot get other support for any proposed studentships. For example, from MRC doctoral training partnership funding.

You must include the cost of any studentships in the 'other directly-incurred costs' section of your Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) application. Tick the box 'is exception' to claim student costs at 100%. Costs should be at or above the [research council minimum stipend and fees rates \(MRC website\)](#). They should include any expected increases in costs for the duration of the studentship.

Find out more on the [studentships page \(MRC website\)](#). You should also read the statement of [expectations for doctoral training](#).

How to apply

Application deadlines for Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board funding are usually around January, May and September although sometimes dates can change so check the funding finder for details.

[Search funding opportunities](#)

You can submit to any one of the available deadlines in the year.

We do not expect you to submit more than two applications at the same time and encourage you to focus on application quality, not the number you can submit. Read our [guidance for applicants for details of our resubmission process \(MRC website\)](#).

Pre-application stage

You must contact the programme manager at least six weeks before you apply for a partnership grant. You must provide a brief abstract of your application to help them decide if it is eligible.

After we have received your abstract, the programme manager will give you advice on how best to develop your application. They will also ask you to email a pre-application summary. This should be no more than two pages A4 but may include an extra page of references if needed.

The summary should include the following information:

- the title of the potential MRC partnership
- a list of the principal investigator, co-investigators and their affiliations
- a list of collaborators (if known at this stage)
- the aims of your application. This should explain why the partnership is important, the nature of the partnership and its activities, and how these align with the partnership grant expectations
- an estimate of the likely cost to MRC including staffing and equipment costs.

You should also provide a two-page CV for the principal investigator and co-investigators, including a summary of recent funding for those investigators. You can add a list of publications as page three of the CV document.

Full application stage

We may invite you to complete a full application via our online Je-S system. We will do this in advance of the closing date.

Your application should include a cover letter confirming the name of the programme manager who agreed you could apply.

You should read [**section two of the MRC guidance for applicants \(MRC website\)**](#) for information on how to complete the application.

Industrial partners

If you want to include one or more industry partners as a project partner, you must also:

- complete the project partner section in Je-S
- submit an MRC industrial collaboration agreement (MICA) form and heads of terms
- include 'MICA' as a prefix to your project title.

Find out more about [**MRC industry collaboration agreements \(MRC website\)**](#).

Case for support

The list below covers specific points that you should address when writing your case for support. You must make sure that your application answers all these questions. You should read this list in conjunction with the general guidance in [**section 2.2.3 of the MRC guidance for applicants \(MRC website\)**](#).

You must include the following in your case for support:

Importance

State the aims of the partnership

Explain:

- why establishing a partnership is necessary for this area of research
- how establishing a partnership will add value to current research, for example creating new capabilities or enhancing coordination
- why you can't access support for the partnership through other means
- how a partnership will improve the UK's international standing in this area.

Partnership plans

Describe the activities associated with the partnership, including timelines and indicating where activities may be concurrent. You may include a Gantt chart to depict this.

For any infrastructure or equipment requests, state how you will use this to further the aims and objectives of the partnership.

If you are requesting funding for an infrastructure project in one university but providing a service to the wider research community, you should make this clear in your application.

If the partnership includes studentships, please state:

- when students will start
- which department or research organisation they may be based in
- if relevant, state when students may move between departments/research organisations.

Outline future plans:

- for sustaining the partnership beyond the proposed duration of MRC funding
- for accessing further funding (from MRC and elsewhere) to support any follow-on hypothesis-driven research, which may develop as a result of the partnership.

Participants in the partnership and existing funding

Describe:

- how the partnership grant will enable researchers to work together and how it will build capability in a strategic area, for example, partnerships that bring together researchers who otherwise would not work together. There should be clear discrimination between co-investigators and partners or collaborators
- how the partnership between the participants will benefit the wider research community.

Justify why each of the named investigators is necessary for the partnership, including their level of time commitment.

Provide a brief report on the progress of recent research for investigators in the partnership including an acknowledgement of any previous or current MRC funding and progress to date on delivery of this research. You should also include the scale of support provided, for example, the number of post doctorates and technicians, and total amount of consumables and equipment.

Environment

Describe:

- the environment in which the partnership will take place
- the support the partnership will receive from the host research organisation. For example, reducing or waiving co-investigator salary, associated estates costs and other in-kind contributions such as towards the cost of equipment.

If your proposal requests shared equipment, describe where this will be and how the host research organisation will support this equipment. Describe the management arrangements for ensuring equity of access.

If your proposal includes studentships, describe the strategic rationale for including these within the partnership, including the added value to the student's training experience.

Management

Provide an overview of how you will manage the partnership. For example, who will bring coherence and management to the partnership and how? Outline any plans for:

- regular meetings
- bringing together disparate communities
- a strategy for the set-up of networks
- arrangements for access and upkeep of equipment.

While networking or workshop activities can add value to a partnership, we will not accept applications centred only on these types of activities.

If you are requesting students in a multi-centre environment, explain the arrangements for achieving high standards of supervision and mentoring. You should also confirm that the lead research organisation will ensure students have access to appropriate postgraduate skills training and support services. This must be in line with our [expectations for doctoral training](#).

Applying through Je-S

You must apply through the [Joint Electronic Submission system \(Je-S\)](#).

For more information, please read the [Je-S how to apply guidance \(PDF, 140KB\)](#).

If you need further help, you can contact the Je-S help desk on 01793 444164 or by email jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org.

You should give your administrative department sufficient notice that you intend to apply. Your organisation must submit your application before 16:00 on the deadline date.

When applying select:

- council: MRC
- document type: standard proposal
- scheme: research grant
- call/type/mode: research boards September 2021 submissions.

How we will assess your application

When we receive your application, it will be peer reviewed by independent experts from the UK and overseas.

You can nominate up to three independent reviewers. We will invite only one to assess your research proposal and may decide not to approach any of your nominated reviewers.

Peer reviewers will assess your application and provide comments. They will also score it using the peer reviewer scoring system against the following criteria:

- importance – how important are the questions, or gaps in knowledge, that are being addressed?
- scientific potential – what are the prospects for good scientific progress?
- resources requested – are the funds requested essential for the work? And do the importance and scientific potential justify funding on the scale requested? Does the proposal represent good value for money?

Read the [detailed assessment criteria \(MRC website\)](#).

We will review these scores and comments at a triage meeting and expect to continue with the highest quality applications with potential to be funded. If your application passes the triage stage, we will give you the chance to respond to reviewers comments.

A board meeting will then discuss your proposal and decide if it is suitable for funding. We make a decision within six months of receiving your application.

Find out more about [our peer review process \(MRC website\)](#).

Contact details

Get advice on your application or choosing a board

Email: mcmb@mrc.ukri.org

Or contact the programme manager most relevant to your research area:

Cell biology, developmental biology and the physical science interface

Dr Holger Apitz

Email: holger.apitz@mrc.ukri.org

Structural studies and biophysics

Dr Anne McGavigan

Email: anne.mcgavigan@mrc.ukri.org

Genomics, gene regulatory networks and synthetic biology

Dr Tim Cullingford

Email: tim.cullingford@mrc.ukri.org

Environmental health, pharmacology and toxicology

Dr Graham Campbell

Email: graham.campbell@mrc.ukri.org

Cancer

Dr Mariana Delfino-Machin

Email: mariana.delfino-machin@mrc.ukri.org

Regenerative medicine

Dr Charlotte Durkin

Email: charlotte.durkin@mrc.ukri.org

See [our science and contacts \(MRC website\)](#).

Get help with using Je-S

Contact Je-S Helpdesk.

Email: jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org

Telephone: 01793 444164

Discuss MRC policy and eligibility

Contact our research funding policy and delivery team.

Email: rfpd@mrc.ukri.org

Telephone: 01793 416440

Additional info

Supporting documents

- [Je-S how to apply guidance \(PDF, 190KB\)](#)

Timeline

- 14 June 2021**
Opening date
- 1 September 2021**
Closing date
- 7 January 2022**
Shortlisting
- 10 to 11 February 2022**
Meeting dates