

Funding opportunity

Molecular and cellular medicine partnership

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Medical Research Council (MRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Publication date:	20 December 2021
Opening date:	15 February 2023 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	3 May 2023 4:00pm UK time

Is this page useful?

Apply for funding to support new partnerships between diverse groups of researchers in molecular and cellular medicine.

You must:

- be a researcher employed by a research organisation eligible to apply for MRC funding
- have at least a postgraduate degree

The project will allow you to:

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

Funding is available for between 1 and 5 years.

This is an ongoing scheme. Application rounds close every January, May and September.

- ! MRC is preparing the [transition of responsive mode funding opportunities to the new UKRI Funding Service](#).
- ! You may need to apply to the next round of this opportunity using the new service. Check this opportunity at the time the next round opens for confirmation on how to apply.

Who can apply

Before applying for funding, check the following:

- [the MRC eligibility guidance for applicants](#)
- [the eligibility of your organisation](#)
- [your eligibility as an individual](#)

Who is eligible to apply

To be eligible to apply for this opportunity you must:

- be a researcher employed by an [eligible research organisation](#)
- have at least a postgraduate degree, although we expect most applicants to have a PhD or medical degree
- be looking to create a novel partnership between a diverse group of researchers
- have plans to establish new, high-value collaborative activities or capabilities that should add value high-quality scientific programmes that are already supported by MRC funded projects and other funders
- show that you will direct the proposed partnership project and be actively engaged in the work
- ensure that researchers invited to participate as co-investigators contribute to the academic leadership of the partnership
- show that you will be able to manage the funding awarded on behalf of MRC, to ensure that the objectives of the partnership are fully delivered
- focus your application within the science area molecular and cellular medicine

Who is not eligible to apply

You cannot apply for a partnership grant if you are:

- looking for funding for a standalone, hypothesis-driven research project that may otherwise be eligible for MRC research or programme grant type funding
- based within an MRC institute. However, members of MRC institutes can apply as co-investigators on partnership grants

Industry and international involvement

You are encouraged to include 1 or more industry partners as project partners in your application.

International applicants

You can include international co-investigators if they provide expertise not available in the UK. The inclusion of an international co-investigator must be discussed and agreed with the [relevant programme manager](#) before you submit the application to us.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns

Read MRC's [guidance on flexible working and career breaks](#). You can also find out more about [MRC's current EDI initiatives](#) and [EDI at UK Research and Innovation](#).

What we're looking for

Scope

We are looking to fund new partnerships between diverse groups of researchers in molecular and cellular medicine.

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.

Please see our [case studies](#) for examples of successful partnership grants and why they were funded by MRC.

The molecular and cellular medicine board (MCMB) 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.

We are looking to fund research in areas including, but not limited to:

- cell biology
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- 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 MCMB remit, such as:
 - nanotechnology
 - chemical biology
 - synthetic biology
- medical bioinformatics, including:
 - biostatistics
 - computational biology
 - systems biology
- cancer
- toxicology and adverse health effects of environmental exposures
- pharmacology

We encourage you to [contact us first to discuss your application](#), and for advice if you believe your research may cross MRC research board or research council interests, or if you would like to apply for a short or long-duration project.

If your application fits another research board remit better, we may decide to transfer it there to be assessed.

Duration

We will fund projects lasting from 1 to 5 years.

What we will fund

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 MRC through funded projects and other funders

Partnership grants may support purchase of equipment, or infrastructure that is key to the aims of the partnership or provides a platform for activities associated with the partnership.

You can request funding for costs such as:

- technician posts
- consumables
- equipment, or infrastructure that is key to the aims of the partnership or provides a platform for activities associated with the partnership
- travel costs
- international collaboration (overseas costs)

- data preservation, data sharing and dissemination costs
- estates or indirect costs

Overseas costs

If international collaboration is key to the success of the partnership, including costs for work undertaken at an overseas research organisation is permitted but [should be discussed with the programme manager](#) before applying. More information on allowable overseas costs can be found in the [MRC guidance for applicants](#).

Investigator salaries

Usually, we will fund only the principal investigator and a small number of co-investigators. Other co-investigators may be involved without funding. If you are asking for funding to cover investigator time, you must justify why the partnership needs this time commitment.

Research costs

Minimal resources should be requested for research, such as postdoctoral research positions may only be supported in exceptional cases, however, where justified, technical posts may be requested as part of the partnership grant.

Partnership grants may support purchase of equipment, or infrastructure that is key to the aims of the partnership or provides a platform for activities associated with the partnership.

What we will not fund

We will not fund:

- research involving randomised trials of clinical treatments
- costs for PhD studentships
- publication costs
- funding to use as a 'bridge' between projects

Please note that project partners are not usually expected to request MRC funding to participate in the partnership, although minor costs, such as travel and subsistence will be considered.

Collaborative activities you can include

Collaborative activities can include:

- networking and partnership activities to:
 - establish multidisciplinary collaborative partnerships or consortia
 - foster and enabling a national or international strategy in this area
 - enable 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

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 MRC programme manager before you apply. Visit the 'who to contact' section of our [molecular and cellular medicine area of investment and support](#) information, to find the relevant person to help you.

Team project partner

We are looking for the inclusion of team project partners that will support your research project through cash or in-kind contributions, such as:

- staff time
- access to equipment
- sites or facilities
- the provision of data
- software or materials

We especially encourage collaboration between academic and industry researchers.

Each project partner must provide a letter of support. If your application involves [industry partners](#), they must provide a company letter of support if the team project partner falls within the [industry collaboration framework](#).

Find out more about [subcontractors and dual roles](#).

Who cannot be included as a team project partner

The individual named as the contact for the project partner organisation cannot also be named as staff.

Supporting skills and talent

We encourage you to follow the principles of [the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) and the [Technician Commitment](#).

International collaboration

If your application includes international applicants, project partners or collaborators, visit [Trusted Research](#) for more information on effective international collaboration.

How to apply

You can submit to any 1 of the available deadlines in the year.

We do not expect you to submit more than 2 applications at the same time. We encourage you to focus on application quality, not the number you can submit. Read our [guidance for applicants about multiple applications](#).

Pre-application stage

You must contact the relevant programme manager at least 6 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 2 pages of A4, but may include an extra page of references if needed.

The summary should include:

- 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
 - how these activities align with the partnership grant expectations
- an estimate of the likely cost to MRC, including staffing and equipment costs

You should also provide a 2 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 3 of the CV document.

Those who are successful at the pre-application stage will be asked to complete a full application.

Full application stage

You should only start the full application stage if you have been invited by email to do so after the pre-application stage.

Full applications must be submitted using our online Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. We will invite you to do this in advance of the closing date if you

have been successful at the pre-application stage.

You should read the [general guidance on how to complete an MRC application \(section 2\)](#).

Applying through Je-S

You must apply through the [Je-S system](#).

We recommend you start your application early. You can save completed details in Je-S at any time and return to continue your application later.

When applying, select 'new document' then:

- council: MRC
- document type: standard proposal
- scheme: research grant
- call/type/mode: Research boards May 2023 submissions

After completing the application, you must select 'submit document'. This will send your application to your host organisation's administration.

Your host organisation's administration is required to complete the submission process. You should allow sufficient time for this between submitting your proposal to them and the funding opportunity closing date.

You should give your administrative department sufficient notice that you intend to apply.

Your organisation must submit your application before 4:00pm on the deadline date.

Indicate that the proposal is a partnership grant

Select the 'grant type' option from the proposal document menu, within the Je-S proposal form. Within the section, select the radio button adjacent to the 'partnership grant' option and select the 'save' button.

Industrial partner information

If you want to include 1 or more industry partners as a project partner, you must also complete the [project partner section in Je-S](#).

MRC industry collaboration framework

If your application involves the collaboration of 1 or more industrial partners, you should review the information published within the [MRC industry collaboration framework \(ICF\)](#) to decide if you should submit your application under the ICF.

After reading the ICF information, if you decide that your application will include industry collaboration, you will need to include the following within your application for each collaborating industry partner:

- [ICF form](#)
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■ [ICF company partner letter of support](#)

The completed ICF form should be uploaded to the Je-S attachments section using the 'MICA form' document type. Please type 'Industry Collaboration Framework form' in the description box.

The company letter of support must use the available template and be uploaded to the relevant project partner entry you are required to add to your Je-S application.

Other documents to submit

In addition to the Je-S application, at the full proposal stage you must also submit:

- your application, which must include a cover letter confirming the name of the programme manager who agreed you could apply (the cover letter should not exceed 2 pages of A4)
- a curriculum vitae (CV) for each named researcher, including investigators and named researchers. Each CV should not exceed 2 sides of A4
- publications (should not exceed 1 side of A4 per named person)
- a case for support, which length should not exceed:
 - 8 pages (for a project with a duration of 36 months or less)
 - 12 pages (for a project with a duration of 37 months or more)
- a justification of resources (should not exceed 2 sides of A4)
- a data management plan (DMP). Page length can vary, [see section 2.2.7 of our attachments guidance](#). You must use the available [DMP template form](#)

You should read the above list, in conjunction with the [MRC case for support general guidance \(section 2.2.3\)](#).

Cover letter

Your application should include a cover letter confirming the name of the programme manager who agreed you could apply. The cover letter should not exceed 2 pages of A4.

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 the list, in conjunction with the [MRC case for support general guidance \(section 2.2.3\)](#).

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 cannot 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 1 university but providing a service to the wider research community, you should make this clear in your application

You should outline future plans for:

- sustaining the partnership beyond the proposed duration of MRC funding
- 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

You should 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 the work of co-investigators and partners or collaborators
- how the partnership between the participants will benefit the wider research community

You should also:

- 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.
- justify the scale of support provided, for example, the number of post doctorates or 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
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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.

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.

Research disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic

You have the option to include a 1 page annex to the case for support, allowing you to provide additional information explaining any disruptions you have encountered to previous or current research, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (where relevant to your pending application).

For further information relating to the annex, please see [the MRC guidance for applicants \(section 2.2.3.6\)](#).

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess your application using the following process.

Peer review

We will invite experts to review your application independently, against the specified criteria for this opportunity.

You can nominate up to 3 reviewers to comment on your application.

Assessment criteria

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

We will assess the importance of the questions, or gaps in knowledge, that are being addressed.

Scientific potential

We will assess what the prospects are for good scientific progress.

Resources requested

We will consider whether:

- funds requested are essential for the work
- importance and scientific potential justify funding on the scale requested
- proposal represents good value for money

For more information about our assessment criteria, [read our detailed assessment criteria](#).

Shortlisting

We will review the comments and scores for each application. Shortlisted applications will go to a panel who will make a funding recommendation.

If your application is shortlisted, you will have 10 working days to respond to reviewers' comments.

Panel

Following peer review, we will invite a panel of experts to collectively review your application against the criteria and rank alongside other applications after which the panel will make a funding recommendation.

Timescale

We aim to complete the assessment process within 6 months of receiving your application.

Feedback

If your application was discussed by a panel and they provided feedback, this will be sent to you when we advise you of the outcome of your application.

Principles of assessment

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) supports the San Francisco [declaration on research assessment \(DORA\)](#) and recognises the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

Find out about the [UKRI principles of assessment and decision making](#).

Contact details

Get help with your application

For help on costings and writing your application, contact your research office. Allow enough time for your organisation's submission process.

Get help with science-related queries

For questions about the scientific aspects of your research proposal, or to ask which science area you should apply to, please [contact the relevant MRC programme manager](#).

You can email the molecular and cellular medicine board admin team, if you're not sure who you should contact, you have a general query, or if you do not receive a response to your email enquiry within 10 working days, please email: mcmb@mrc.ukri.org

Get help with applying through Je-S

[Contact the Je-S helpdesk](#)

Questions about eligibility

Read MRC's [research organisation](#) and [applicant](#) eligibility guidance. If you are still unsure whether you are eligible, contact rfpd@mrc.ukri.org

Additional info

Supporting documents

[Data management plan template form](#)

Timeline



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- Within 10 working days of funding decision meeting**
Informed of funding decision
 - 23 June to 5 September 2023**
Future round open for applications
 - 13 October 2023 to 9 January 2024**
Future round open for applications
 - 16 February to 1 May 2024**
Future round open for applications

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

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<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/molecular-and-cellular-medicine-partnership>