Guidance for Improving Quality of Life, online applications

Guidance for all applicants

Please refer to our Terms and Conditions and Research Strategy when completing your application. These, along with information about the call, can be downloaded from the Help – Support Documents quick link on the online application portal homepage, or from the Help – Support Documents drop-down item in the top right-hand corner of any webpage when you are logged in to Smart Simple.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

To apply you should submit the following:

1. An application using our online application form, by **3pm Tuesday 24 June 2025**.
2. A signed copy of the application by email to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org, which can arrive up to three weeks after the submission deadline.
   a. We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.
   b. If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only provided you annotate the page with the grant reference.

Applications will not be accepted after the submission deadline.

The following points should be considered when submitting your application:

- All applications should be submitted through our online grants-management system, Smart Simple (https://mduk.smartsimpleuk.com/). If you do not have an existing profile on Smart Simple you must create one. If you do not work in an institution that is already listed on our system, you may need to contact us to help you create the profile.

- If you wish to apply for a Muscular Dystrophy UK research grant, please be aware that the principal investigator (defined as the main researcher with overall responsibility for the application) must hold a contract that extends beyond the duration of the grant at an institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. For this Grant Call, Muscular Dystrophy UK will only fund UK-based research although international collaboration is encouraged.

- Each applicant can submit up to one application

- If you currently hold a Muscular Dystrophy UK-funded project or studentship grant, you may still apply for a grant under this scheme.

- We welcome applications from early-career researchers. Researchers should have a research degree e.g. PhD or MD OR, if an allied health professional, should have a postgraduate degree (PhD, MPhil or Masters degree) and/or demonstrate significant experience with clinical trial or other research experience suitable for conducting research and monitoring its progress.

- A single resubmission of previous MDUK grant application is allowed and should be indicated as such in the relevant field in the application form.

- Applicants must write this application in plain English. Further guidance is available in the "The Proposal" section below. We understand that some elements of the research may be technical but, given the mixed nature of the committee assessing the applications, efforts must be made to make the applications comprehensible to non-scientific/non-medical committee members.

Remit

- Muscular Dystrophy UK welcomes applications that will have a benefit for individuals with any of the muscular dystrophies or related neuromuscular conditions. We are looking to support research across the breadth of conditions supported by the charity. We would also welcome applications that address areas relating to single conditions, be they rare or very-rare

Guidance: Improving Quality of Life applications. Version 2025.

conditions. Please refer to the list of [conditions supported by Muscular Dystrophy UK](). If a specific neuromuscular condition does not appear in this list and you want to make a research application related to that condition, please contact our grant helpline for guidance ([researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org]()).

- Research applications in this scheme should specifically address an unmet need or offer an innovative solution to a problem that would improve the quality of life of people with neuromuscular conditions.

- Applications can relate to any aspect of research that may lead to an improvement in the quality of life of people with neuromuscular conditions. Our community has specifically highlighted the following areas of research as being important:

  - Improving accessibility. This could include research that provides novel solutions to improve access to public or other spaces or public transport
  - Mental health & psychological support
  - Assistive Technology or physical aids
  - Lifestyle (exercise or diet)
  - Fatigue
  - Physiotherapy
  - Pain management
  - Hydrotherapy

- We are interested in funding in these areas, but will consider any application for research in any area that will lead to improvements in quality of life for people with neuromuscular conditions.

- We appreciate that the pathway to deliver a product (or solution) to the target population is complex and that this funding alone will not be sufficient to take it 'to market'. However, we expect applicants to outline the pathway that their product/solution will take to benefit lives of people with a muscle wasting condition and have a clear plan to achieve a specific a milestone on this pathway.

- Strong applications will engage people with lived experience of the condition(s).

- It is important for applicants to view their research strategically and explain how this proposed research fits with the charity's [Research Strategy]() when completing sections of the form in the Proposal section.

Completing the online form:

- Complete all sections of the application form. Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk.

- You may find it easier to draft the questions offline and copy and paste them into the online form when complete. When copying and pasting from Word, formatting (such as italics, bold, underlining) will be lost, but paragraphs will be kept.

- Word limits must be adhered to.

- Uploaded documents must be in pdf format.

- You can save your application at any time and come back to complete it later. You can also download a pdf of your application at any point.

If you still have questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

Guidance for completing an online Improving Quality of Life application form

In Smart Simple, go to My Profile and complete the required fields. This information will then be used to auto-populate the relevant fields in your grant application. Submissions cannot be completed unless the required fields in your profile are complete. For future grant calls you will be prompted to review your My Profile information to ensure it is up to date.

People

Who can apply for a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant?

- Principal applicants must hold a contract at an Institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. We are only able to fund research within the UK at the present time, although international collaborations are encouraged. Any exceptions to this will be made known when the grant call(s) are announced – please check the Improving Quality of Life call page for more information.

- We welcome applications from early-career researchers (defined as researchers who possess a PhD who have not yet gained, or are transitioning to, an independent research career) as well as existing principal investigators.

- Researchers should have a research degree e.g. PhD or MD OR, if an allied health professional, should have a postgraduate degree (PhD, MPhil or Masters

degree) and/or demonstrate significant experience with trial procedures, conducting research and monitoring its progress

Principal investigator

In this section we want to understand the track record of the Principal Investigator.

The Principal Investigator should have a contract of sufficient duration to cover the length of the proposed project. This is what we aim to understand when we ask the questions regarding "The length of the Principal Applicant's contract with the employing Institution" and "Where does the funding for the Principal Applicant's salary come from?" If you do not have a contract of sufficient length, we may request a letter of support from your Head of Department to provide a guarantee that the project will be adequately supervised for its duration.

Co-applicant details

To add a Co-applicant the Principal Investigator (the Applicant) must have the Co-applicant's PIN. To get a PIN, the Co-applicant must create a profile in Smart Simple. The PIN can be found on the co-applicant's profile page. The Principal Investigator should request the PIN from the co-applicant and enter it on the application form to assign the Co-applicant to the grant application. The Co-applicant will be able to view the application and make changes, but only the Principal Investigator can submit the form.

Co-applicants can view the application by selecting the Grants and Applications tab from the home page and selecting the Associated Applications tab in the Draft Applications section.

Ensure you enter the number of hours the Co-applicant will be dedicating to the project.

Collaborators

Enter the details of all collaborators in the table provided; a letter of collaboration is required from each one. Use the filename format, 'Letter-of-collaboration-[FirstInitial-surname]' to name the files and upload them in pdf format. The letters can be uploaded using the upload buttons. The number of collaborator letters must match the number of collaborators in order for your application to be submitted.

Proposed researcher

This grant scheme does not carry salary. However, if the proposed researcher (the person doing the research) is different to the applicant or co-applicants and is

known, please enter their details. We may require further information about the funding for this individual's salary.

Project Summary

Expected start date

You will receive the outcome of your grant application in early-mid November 2025. The expected start date of the project should therefore be December 2025 or later.

Grants should start within six months of the award date. If you are awarded a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant and experience delays that mean you cannot start within six months, please contact us at Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

The expected start date is merely a guide. It will appear on your award letter should you be successful in gaining a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant, but it is not binding. Please refer to our Terms and Conditions which sets out the expectations with regards to project start dates after the award is made.

Project title

The project title should

- Be descriptive.

- Refer, if possible, to the main condition (or group of conditions) relevant to the application.

Note that your title will be used when we describe the research we fund and may be shared with external sources. If you do not want the title to be shared please contact us.

Project length

Grants of up to 12 months in duration are available. Please note that if you are applying for a grant of less than 12 months duration you should select 12 months from the drop-down menu and indicate the duration of the grant in the proposal text.

Summary of Project

Please provide a summary in plain English, suitable for a mixed audience of researchers and non-scientists, in 200 words or less. Further guidance on writing

in plain English is available in the "The Proposal" section below. If possible, mention the main condition (or group of conditions) that is relevant to the application. Note that we may share the abstract with external sources unless you indicate that the abstract is confidential. To do this please write the word "CONFIDENTIAL" at the beginning of the abstract.

No other sections of the application will be shared externally, except with organisations that provide funding to Muscular Dystrophy UK with whom there are confidentiality agreements in place. If you consider your application to be commercially sensitive ensure you follow the instructions in the intellectual property section.

Condition

Please select the single most relevant condition for your application as the primary condition.

You should select the overarching group name for the condition, following which you will be given the option to select the exact condition. For example, if you are looking for Duchenne muscular dystrophy you should select, 'muscular dystrophy' and then 'Duchenne muscular dystrophy'. We understand that some applications may be relevant to multiple conditions. In that case please choose "various" and ensure that you list the main conditions relevant to your application in the text under the Proposal tab.

When you select the group heading, if there are additional condition sub-types, e.g. Duchenne muscular dystrophy, myotonic dystrophy type 1, they will appear in the sub-type, drop-down menu.

You will then be able to select other relevant conditions using the tick boxes. Select the group heading and sub-type.

Submission to multiple funders

Muscular Dystrophy UK will only consider an application if we are currently the only funder doing so. If your application is currently with another funder, we will not process your application. You are welcome to apply in future should your application elsewhere be unsuccessful.

The Proposal

Writing your application in Plain English

All applications made in this grant scheme should be written in plain English to allow the members of the committee who do not have a scientific/medical background to understand the application.

Keep scientific terminology or jargon at a minimum and refrain from including references to material that is not available to the general public. Avoid the use of abbreviations where possible. You may find it helpful to ask a non-scientist friend or relative to read this application prior to submission to check readability. visit the news section of our website to see the level of plain English we would expect you to use and refer to the guidance we have developed with our Lay Research Panel on writing in plain English. Your application will be screened by the members of the Research Team and you may be asked to rewrite the application if it is too technical. Failure to provide sufficient and understandable information could lead to rejection of the application.

More useful resources and guidance to help you write your application in plain English can be found on the NIHR website.

Background to the proposal

Provide sufficient background to give members of the review committee an understanding of the basis for your proposal and summarise any research that gives your proposal context. When completing this section consider:

- If you have preliminary data, refer to it in the text and upload it as a pdf in the supplementary information section at the bottom of the Proposal tab.

- Formatting does not always pull through when pasting from Word documents. Check that special characters are present in your pasted text (this also pertains to other sections below where you might use special characters).

Hypothesis or reasoning

This is an opportunity for you to make a clear, brief statement outlining the underlying scientific hypothesis for your project. If, for any reason this is not possible, outline the reasoning that underpins your project.

Methods of research including overall study design

Include the specifics of your methods and any key elements of study design. This will be dependent on the nature of your project but consider the following elements that are sometimes omitted from applications:

- Ensure that any power calculations that underpin your study design have been included.

- If there are elements of the project that could be considered high-risk include any plans you have for mitigation: what alternative plans would you put in place to make sure the project succeeds?

- Make sure your study design aligns with the costings you have provided – do not leave out costings for any elements of the project.

- If your project is clinical, describe any attempts you are making to include patients in the trial design.

Objectives, timescales and milestones

Give us a list of objectives for your research.

In this section we also want you to detail the key milestones for your project. The committee will review the milestones as part of the process of reviewing your proposal. It is crucial that your milestones are clear and achievable.

Ensure that milestones and timelines for your project match the Gantt chart provided in the next section.

Gantt Chart

Provide a simple Gantt chart that illustrates the timelines for the main sections of your application and that clarifies where any major milestones lie.

Remember that only pdf documents can be uploaded.

Outcomes

In this section we want to understand the expected outcomes of your research. For example, what will be the benefit for people with muscle wasting conditions in the short or long term? Do you expect to apply for other funding on the basis of

results from this project? Are there other tangible outcomes like publication or other forms of dissemination?

Next steps

We appreciate that the pathway to deliver a product (or solution) to the target population is complex and that this funding alone will not be sufficient to take it 'to market'. However, we expect applicants to outline the pathway that their product/solution will take to benefit lives of people with a muscle wasting condition and have a clear plan to achieve a specific a milestone on this pathway.

Therefore, if your research is expected to fit into a larger context or you expect the project to require further development beyond the end of the requested funds, please outline how you think the project will develop, what kind of funding may be required and how long you think further research will take before tangible benefits will be seen.

Will this research involve patient participation?

Will people with muscle wasting conditions be directly involved in your research? Have people with muscle wasting conditions been involved in the design of your research study? Note that strong applications will involve people with lived experience of the condition(s). Therefore, if you answer no to this question please provide a reason why you think your application will not be enhanced by patient involvement.

Engaging Supporters

Briefly explain how you will engage with people who are directly or indirectly affected by muscle wasting conditions, during the course of your project.

Detailed justification of financial support

Help us to understand how your request for support breaks down.

- List likely types of consumables, approximate costs for categories of consumables (see also guidance on the Finance section below).

- For clinical studies, applicants are expected to include costs relating to participant reimbursement (e.g., travel costs). Details of major consumables costs are also requested under the "finance" tab.

Citing and referencing published work

Citations: ensure citations are clearly marked and separable when reading the text. Note that formatting does not carry over into the form when pasting from Word.

References: Please use Vancouver referencing style (see here for guidance). Expand the author line to include up to 20 authors if the Principal Applicant, Co-Applicant(s) or collaborators are authors.

Supplementary information

Use this section to upload supplementary information or data relevant to the grant proposal, e.g. figures, tables, timescales. Files must be in pdf format.

Finance

The Summary of Financial Support Requested table should include all costs being requested from Muscular Dystrophy UK for this project.

You can apply for up to £10,000 of consumables.

Finance: Exclusions

- Travel costs can only be requested if the travel is an integral part of the project; this must be clearly demonstrated in the grant application.

- We do not cover the costs of attending scientific meetings or society membership and these should not be included in the application.

- We do not fund computer equipment unless integral to the project in which circumstance a strong case must be made for the requested funds in the Detailed justification of financial support section of the form

- We do not fund equipment costs unless integral to the project. We expect laboratories to provide and maintain equipment for general use and only under specific circumstances where specialist equipment is required will we consider providing funding.

- Generally, we do not provide equipment maintenance costs within this grant scheme.

- We will not cover publication costs.

Applicants are strongly advised to confirm with their institution's Finance Office that the amounts specified in their submission are accurate.

11

Excess treatment costs

For all clinical research that needs Health Research Authority (HRA) approval (refer to criteria for HRA approval), a Schedule of Events Costs Attribution Template (SoECAT) must be completed, approved and submitted with the grant application. Only clinical research needs HRA approval. For researchers carrying out clinical research outside of England, please contact our grants helpline at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org for guidance.

You will need the assistance of a local AcoRD specialist to complete and approve the SoECAT form. For further information see the NIHR website.

We strongly recommend that you contact your local AcoRD specialist as soon as you know you are planning a piece of clinical research, to allow sufficient time for completion and approval of SoECAT before the grant application deadline.

From 1 April 2023 applicants have been required to use the online NIHR Central Portfolio Management System (CPMS). In order to create a SoECAT, you must create and activate an account in CPMS. Please refer to the user guide for further guidance on creating an account.

Guidance for completion of the SoECAT is present in an online tool. Further details can be found on the Online SoECAT Guidance page and within the Online SoECAT Guidance Module, which includes video tutorials and linked resources (an NIHR Learn account is required to access and enrol onto this module).

Assistance with designing your research application is also available from the NIHR CRN and Research Design Service.

Once the form has been completed and authorized, please save the 'study information' and 'summary' page of the 'Funder Export' form as a single PDF and upload it with your application in the Finance section of the application form. If the final form cannot be completed prior to submission of the application, you must contact us at Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org to explain the delay.

Muscular Dystrophy UK is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). You may find more useful information on the AMRC website here.

Ethical Issues

If the grant is awarded, it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all necessary ethics approvals are in place **before** the start of the project. If you wish to activate the project before ethics approval is in place, please contact us at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org to discuss the issue further. The grant will not be activated until the Research Team are satisfied that lack of ethics approval will not impede the project or influence timelines.

Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

Please refer to our Terms and Conditions for information about intellectual property and ensure that the conditions are met if the proposed research is likely to lead to patentable or commercially exploitable results.

We use information from your main application and your plain English application in order to fundraise and to communicate about the work we fund. In order not to create a prior disclosure that would damage chances of commercial development, we need to understand what elements of your proposal must be kept strictly confidential.

Details of your application are shared in confidence with peer reviewers, members of our Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Panel and our Board of Trustees and when relevant, charitable trusts and other donors.

Supporting Documentation

This section can be used for uploading additional documents that are relevant to your application, e.g. a letter of support from someone who is not a co-applicant or collaborator. Files must be in pdf format.

Further information

Indicate if you would like to receive further correspondence from Muscular Dystrophy UK. GDPR requires that we have approval to keep your details for a specific purpose. For research and other mailings we may keep your details indefinitely for the purposes to which you agree. You can ask for your details to be removed at any time by contacting researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

Departmental Support

This section *cannot* be completed online.

After submitting your application you will receive a pdf version of the application by email. Send the signed form to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.

Guidance: Improving Quality of Life applications. Version 2025.

- We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.

- If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only, provided you annotate the page with the grant reference

The application must be signed by

- Your Head of Department in which the proposed research and training will be carried out, or an appropriate signatory e.g. Dean, if the applicant is Head of Department.

- The principal investigator

- An authorised member of your Research Office/Finance department

Please send the signed electronic copy of the application to researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org *within two weeks* of the deadline for the call.

What happens after submission?

Milestones for the selection process of your grant application are given below; *please note the dates given are approximate and for guidance only*. Find out more about the assessment process on our website. You will be contacted by email when your applicant response is due, or if there are any other actions you need to take; these will all be done via your online account.

Milestone	Date
Submission deadline	3pm on Tuesday 24 June 2025.
Submit signed application	15 July 2025
The committee provides comments to applicants	Early August
Applicants respond to Committee comments	Early August to Early September 2025
Formal outcome letter - you will receive a formal letter (by email) with the outcome of your application and feedback from the Committee	Early-mid November 2025

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org.