Small Research Grants: Guidance for Applicants

Overview

The **Small Research Grant Programme** supports UK-based researchers in building evidence to improve care and treatment for people with pulmonary fibrosis. The call encourages projects that use:

- **Existing Data** – to analyse trends, identify interventions, and address gaps in policy and practice.
- **Qualitative Research** – to capture patient and caregiver experiences to inform care improvements.
- **Scoping Reviews** – to identify knowledge gaps to help shape future research priorities.

Funding Available: £10,000 total, supporting one or more projects, depending on the funding requested by successful applicants.

Project Duration: 6–18 months.

Key Deadlines

- Call Opens: 06 April 2025
- Submission Deadline: 05 May 2025, 23:59
- Funding Decision Notification by: 25 June 2025

Eligibility

Lead Applicant:

- Based in the UK (university, NHS institution, hospice, or research institute).
- Open to MSc students, PhD candidates, early-career researchers, and health professionals.
- International collaborators are permitted (but cannot hold the grant).

Project Scope:

Proposals must align with at least one of the following objectives:

- Use existing datasets to analyse trends or identify potential interventions.
- Capturing patient and caregiver perspectives via qualitative research.
- Address gaps in evidence through scoping reviews.

Research questions

We are looking to fund patient-centred projects that seek to generate new evidence highlighting the barriers to care and treatment access for people with fibrotic ILDs, particularly in underserved populations.

This includes, but is not limited to, addressing health inequalities—such as regional disparities, social deprivation, and demographic factors such as sex and ethnicity—and improving access to anti-fibrotic treatments and multidisciplinary care.

The focus is on strengthening the evidence base to support future policy change, ensuring equitable, timely, and coordinated care for people living with pulmonary fibrosis.

Budget

Applicants may request funding for direct costs of the research:

- Research staff salaries.
- Data access fees, software licenses, or transcription costs for qualitative studies.
- Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE), e.g., focus groups or workshops.
- Dissemination, e.g., plain-language summaries and community events, open-access publication fees.

Excluded Costs:

- Overheads or indirect costs.
- Salaries for permanent staff.

Application Contents

Applicants must complete all sections of the application form, adhering to the provided word count guidelines. The form is structured to address key elements of the research project, expertise, and alignment with funder priorities. The sections are as follows:

Section 1: Plain English Project Overview (200–300 words)

- Purpose: Introduce the project in accessible, non-technical language, focusing on patient-centred impact.
- Key Elements:
    - Project Title: Concise and descriptive title that resonates with both technical reviewers and the public.
    - Project Aim and Objectives: What the project seeks to achieve and why it matters to patients and caregivers.
    - Importance and Patient Impact: Highlight unmet needs and how the project provides immediate and longer-term benefits.

Section 2: Scientific Abstract (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Provide a concise technical overview for reviewers.
- Key Elements:
    - Background and Objectives: Context and goals of the project.
    - Summary of Approach: Type of research (e.g., dataset analysis, scoping review, or qualitative methods).
    - Anticipated Outcomes: How the findings contribute to knowledge, practice, or policy.

Section 3: Applicant Details (100–150 words)

- Purpose: Provide concise details about the primary applicant and collaborators (if applicable).
- Key Elements:
    - Name, role, institutional affiliation, and contact information.
    - Collaborators: Names, roles, and areas of expertise.

Section 4: Addressing Priorities and Relevance (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Demonstrate alignment with funder priorities and how the research addresses patient needs.
- Key Elements:

    - Alignment with Research Priorities: Clear connection to funder goals (e.g., equitable care, improved services).
    - Patient Needs and Benefits: Address real-world challenges faced by patients and caregivers.
    - Scope and Relevance (for scoping reviews): Define the boundaries and focus of the analysis.

Section 5: Methodology and Data Sources (200–450 words)

- Purpose: Provide a detailed explanation of methods tailored to the project type.
- Key Elements:
    - Ethical Approvals: Plans to secure ethical approvals and commitment to standards (e.g., GDPR).
    - *For Secondary Data Analysis:*
        - Data Access and Transparency: Process for accessing datasets and ensuring compliance.
        - Protocol Summary and Statistical Plan: Analytical techniques for robust findings.
    - *For Scoping Reviews:*
        - Approach and Transparency: Methods for identifying and analysing sources.
        - Selection Criteria: Inclusion and exclusion criteria are aligned with the objectives.
    - *For Qualitative Methods:*
        - Data Collection and Transparency: Recruitment and participant involvement.
        - Data Analysis Framework: Techniques for generating meaningful insights.

Section 6: Addressing Health Inequalities (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Demonstrate how the project addresses healthcare disparities.
- Key Elements:
    - Inequalities Identified: Specific challenges to be tackled (e.g., geographic, socioeconomic).
    - Strategies for Equity: Methods for ensuring inclusive analysis and recruitment.
    - Recommendations for Change: Actionable outcomes to improve equity in care.

Section 7: Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Show how patients or the public are engaged in the research.
- Key Elements:
    - PPI Activities: Plans for meaningful involvement at all stages of the project.
    - Alignment with Patient Needs: How patient feedback informs the research design.
    - Engagement Methods: Strategies to ensure inclusivity and impactful involvement.

Section 8: Dissemination and Impact (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Explain how findings will be shared and their expected impact.
- Key Elements:
    - Dissemination Plan: Strategies to communicate findings to diverse audiences.

    - Formats and Channels: Outputs (e.g., reports, infographics) tailored for accessibility.
    - Anticipated Impact: Changes inspired by the research (e.g., improved policies or care pathways).

Section 9: Deliverables and Timeline (150–250 words)

- Purpose: Provide a clear roadmap for completing the project.
- Key Elements:
    - Main Outputs: Reports, datasets, or actionable insights tied to project goals.
    - Timeline: Key activities and milestones aligned with funder expectations.
    - Visual Tools (if applicable): How tools like dashboards or maps will support stakeholders.

Section 10: Budget and Justification (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Outline how funding will be used to achieve project goals.
- Key Elements:
    - Total Funding Requested: Clear total amount.
    - Detailed Breakdown of Costs: Itemized expenses (e.g., staff time, software, PPI activities).
    - Justification: Why each expense is essential and cost-effective.

Section 11: Eligibility and Expertise (250–350 words)

- Purpose: Highlight the skills, qualifications, and experience of the applicant.
- Key Elements:
    - Professional Background: Current role and its alignment with project objectives.
    - Relevant Expertise: Experience with similar projects, datasets, or methodologies.
    - Motivation: Personal or professional commitment to addressing pulmonary fibrosis challenges.

Section 12: Declaration and Submission

- Purpose: Confirm applicant commitment to the proposed project.
- Key Elements:
    - Signed Declaration: Statement of accuracy and dedication from the lead applicant.
    - Institutional Approval: Confirmation of support from the applicant's host institution.

Section 13: Supporting Documents

- Letters of Institutional Support: Confirmation of resources from the host institution.
- Gantt Chart or Timeline (optional): High-level roadmap for project activities and milestones.

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be anonymised before expert review. Reviewers will not receive Section 3: Applicant Details.

Applications are scored across five criteria:

1. Alignment with APF Research Priorities (30%):
    - Does the research address priority areas such as improving diagnosis, care, or treatment?

    - Are gaps in knowledge or patient needs clearly identified?
2. **Scientific Merit and Project Design (30%):**
    - Is the methodology feasible and rigorous?
    - For qualitative research, is the lived experience effectively captured?
3. **Patient and Public Involvement (10%):**
    - Are patients/caregivers meaningfully engaged throughout?
    - Is their input integrated into the project design and dissemination plans?
4. **Addressing Health Inequalities (10%):**
    - Does the project tackle disparities in access, treatment, or outcomes?
    - Are recruitment and analysis strategies inclusive?
5. **Applicant Eligibility and Expertise (20%):**
    - Does the applicant demonstrate relevant skills and experience?
    - If early-career, does the project support professional development?

Additional Tips for Applicants

1. **Using Datasets:** Explain the data source, relevance, and analysis methods.
    - Example: "We will analyse national registry data to identify trends in pulmonary rehabilitation access."
2. **Conducting Qualitative Research:** Detail recruitment plans and frameworks like thematic analysis to capture lived experiences.
    - Example: "Semi-structured interviews with patients and caregivers will highlight care barriers."
3. **Scoping Reviews**: Map evidence to address knowledge gaps and future priorities.
    - Example: "This review will evaluate non-drug interventions to improve patient quality of life."
4. **Engagement and Impact:** Ensure findings inform policy or practice.
    - Example: "Results will guide policy changes for improved diagnostic pathways in primary care."

Contact Information

For queries, contact the Research Team at research@actionpf.org