

Small Research Grants Review and Scoring Guidance

Purpose

This guidance explains how applications will be reviewed and scored for the Small Research Grant Programme. It is designed to help applicants understand the key criteria and ensure their submissions align with funder priorities and expectations.

Core Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on five core criteria:

- 1. Alignment with APF Research Priorities (30%)**
How well does the proposed project address the APF's strategic priorities, such as advancing equitable healthcare, reducing diagnostic delays, or improving outcomes for underserved populations?
- 2. Scientific Merit and Project Design (30%)**
Is the project design robust and appropriate for the proposed research question?
Does it demonstrate potential for new knowledge or tangible improvements in care?
- 3. Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) (10%)**
How meaningfully have patients, caregivers or the public been involved in shaping the project? Have their perspectives influenced the design, methods, or dissemination?
- 4. Addressing Health Inequalities (10%)**
Does the project identify and address health disparities? Are the proposed recruitment, analysis, or dissemination approaches inclusive of underserved populations?
- 5. Applicant Expertise and Relevance (20%)**
Does the applicant have the skills and experience necessary to deliver the project?
How does the project fit into their professional development?

Scoring Guidance

Applications will be scored on a scale of 0–10 for each criterion, reflecting the following levels of quality:

10–7 (Excellent to Strong):

- Addresses all aspects of the criterion comprehensively.
- Demonstrates exceptional clarity, relevance, and impact.
- Provides clear evidence of meaningful patient involvement, health equity strategies, and robust project design.

6–5 (Good to Adequate):

- Meets the criterion adequately with minor weaknesses.
- Demonstrates relevance to APF’s research priorities but lacks depth in certain areas.
- Provides some evidence of patient involvement and consideration of health inequalities, but these are not consistently integrated.

4–0 (Weak to Not Addressed):

- Does not sufficiently address the criterion.
- Lacks relevance, clarity, or robust design, with significant omissions or weaknesses.

Criteria Details and Tips for Applicants

1. Alignment with Research Priorities (20%)

- Focus: How relevant and significant is the proposed research?
- Tips:
 - Clearly state how your project addresses funder priorities such as equity, early diagnosis, or patient-centred care.
 - Emphasize how your research will directly benefit patients and caregivers.
 - *Example:* "Our project focuses on reducing diagnostic delays for rural patients, a key priority for underserved groups."

2. Scientific Merit and Project Design (30%)

- Focus: Are the research question and methodology robust, logical, and feasible?
- Tips:
 - Clearly explain your research design and justify your chosen methods.
 - Ensure your Plain English Overview is concise, jargon-free, and accessible.
 - *Example:* "We will use thematic analysis to identify diagnostic barriers, followed by a scoping review to provide actionable insights."

3. Patient and Public Involvement (20%)

- Focus: How meaningfully are patients or caregivers involved?
- Tips:

- Describe how you've engaged people with lived experience at different stages of the project.
- If no involvement is planned, explain why.
- *Example:* "Focus groups with patients helped shape our study design, ensuring questions reflect lived experiences."

4. Addressing Health Inequalities (20%)

- Focus: Does the project address disparities in healthcare access, outcomes, or participation?
- Tips:
 - Identify specific inequalities your research will address (e.g., by sex, ethnicity, or geography).
 - Highlight how your recruitment or analysis promotes inclusivity and representation.
 - If no consideration of health inequalities is planned, explain why.
 - *Example:* "We will recruit participants from underserved communities to ensure their voices are represented in our findings."

5. Applicant Expertise and Relevance (10%)

- Focus: Does the applicant demonstrate the ability to deliver the project?
- Tips:
 - Emphasize transferable skills, prior experience, and training relevant to the project.
 - Highlight how this project fits into your career goals and development.
 - *Example:* "As a PhD candidate in Respiratory Medicine, this project will build on my expertise in health inequality research and strengthen my career trajectory in academic and patient-centred research."

Early-Career Applicants

The scoring process is designed to be fair for MSc, PhD, and early-career researchers. For applicants without extensive publications or outputs:

- Reviewers will prioritise transferable skills, training, and potential over established track records.
- Contributions to collaborative projects or alternative outputs (e.g., internal reports or policy briefs) will be considered.

- Emphasis will be placed on how the project supports future career development.

Overall Scoring and Feedback

Each application will receive an overall score out of 50, with written feedback provided. Applications scoring **30 or higher** are generally considered for funding. Reviewers will highlight strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement, ensuring a constructive review process.

Final Notes for Applicants

- Review the scoring criteria as you prepare your application to ensure all core aspects are addressed.
- Use the guidance in each section of the application form to provide clear, concise, and relevant responses.
- Remember, this program values **equity, patient involvement, and impactful research**—focus on these throughout your application.

Registered office:
Action for Pulmonary Fibrosis, Stuart House,
East Wing, St John's Street, Peterborough PE1 5DD



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