



EPILEPSY RESEARCH
INSTITUTE UK

EXPLORE PILOT GRANT

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

2026 – 2027

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1. EPILEPSY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

About the Epilepsy Research Institute

The Epilepsy Research Institute serves as the central hub for the epilepsy research community. Our mission is to radically advance research for the 1 in 100 people living with the condition.

Guided by the epilepsy community's priorities, our research model is built on six key themes, led by expert working groups of scientists, clinicians, and emerging talent. We involve people affected by epilepsy in every stage of the research process as we work to advance understanding, prevention, and treatment.

By driving awareness, strategic funding and collaboration across academia, government, the NHS, industry and patient groups, we are turning bold ideas into real world impact.

A life free from epilepsy is possible, but only through research.

Our research strategy and themes

Guided by the epilepsy community's priorities identified through a James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership, our research model is built on six key themes, led by the Epilepsy Research Institute's Theme Leads and supported by their wider advisory task force. This year, we particularly welcome applications addressing the Mortality, Morbidity & Risk theme and the Reproduction & Hormones theme.

Contact us

Please let us know if you have any questions or need help. You can email us at grants@epilepsy-institute.org.uk

2. EXPLORE PILOT GRANT

Scope

Applications are invited for awards of up to £40,000, for up to 18 months.

Explore Pilot Grants provide research funding for fundamental, data, and clinical projects investigating the causes, diagnosis, or treatment of epilepsy and associated conditions. Pilot grant proposals provide the opportunity to test new ideas and explore speculative work. Explore Pilot Grants should be used to generate data that enables researchers to apply for larger-scale funding. The grant award can support research costs, equipment, and salaries; however, there must be a clear emphasis on the generation of new/preliminary data. The project must be a novel piece of research and not part of a project or fellowship already being funded by the Institute or other funder.

Eligibility

Applicants should be graduates in medicine, one of the sciences allied to medicine, neuroscience, engineering, or mathematics. We advise applicants who are external to the epilepsy field to include a senior expert in epilepsy as a supervisor or collaborator on their proposal. Applicants must be a resident in the UK and affiliated with an academic institution in the UK.

Applications are open to everyone, but we especially encourage applications from Early Career Researchers, new investigators and those from outside of the epilepsy field. We define an early career researcher as someone who is no more than 8 active research years (full-time or part-time equivalent) following completion of their doctoral studies.

Applications permitted per grant round

During any Epilepsy Research Institute grant round, an applicant can submit one application per award type (e.g., Explore Pilot Grant). For Fellowships, an individual researcher may be named as a supervisor on a maximum of two applications.

There is no limit on the number of times an individual researcher can be named as a co-applicant on submitted applications. However, co-applicants' roles should be clearly defined within the application.

Active awards permitted

At any time, an individual researcher may be named as the principal investigator or supervisor on a maximum of two active grants. This includes Endeavour Project Grants, Explore Pilot Grants, all Fellowships, and co-funded PhD studentships. Being a PhD supervisor within our Doctoral Training Centres does not count towards this limit.

Please note that existing Epilepsy Research Institute grant holders are not eligible for funding unless the reporting of outcomes from their existing funded grants is up to date.

Flexible working and leave

We believe that researchers should be supported to take periods of leave when they need to and that part-time opportunities should be available. We're supportive of our funded researchers, including PhD students working on research we fund, taking leave when needed. This may include family leave (maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental leave) and sick leave. This is our position on researcher leave, but as researchers working on our funded projects aren't our employees, you should check and follow the relevant leave policies at your institution.

3. APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

Timeline

- 3 August 2026 – grant round opens for preliminary applications.
- **28 September 2026, 4pm** – DEADLINE for submission of preliminary applications.
- November 2026 – preliminary applications shortlisted by our Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). Shortlisted applicants are invited to submit a full application.
- November - December 2026 – shortlisted applicants take part in Shape Network Application Clinics in advance of submitting a full application.

- **18 January 2027, 4pm** – DEADLINE for shortlisted applicants to submit their full application.
- January 2027 – full applications are sent externally for independent expert review.
- February 2027 – applicants have the opportunity to respond to expert review comments.
- April 2027 – applicants are notified of the outcome of their application.

Submitting your application

Applicants must submit completed application forms, in Word format, to grants@epilepsy-institute.org.uk by 4pm on the day of the deadline. Any applications received after this time will not be considered. If you do not receive a confirmation of receipt within two working days of submitting, it might mean that your submission has not been received. In this case, it is your responsibility to follow up with us to ensure your application has been delivered.

Do not send a covering letter, additional material or supporting references, or refer to any additional resources (e.g. personal or departmental websites). These will neither be considered nor distributed to reviewers.

Please follow the guidance about word limits, the inclusion of figures and tables, and references within the application form. Failure to do so may result in your application being discounted.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

We recognise generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools present opportunities and may bring benefits in the context of research. However, the use of generative AI tools in the grant application and assessment process also presents potential risks in areas such as rigour, transparency, originality, reliability, data protection, confidentiality, intellectual property, copyright, and bias.

We want to protect against potential ethical, legal, and integrity issues in the use of generative AI tools to maintain the high standards of the research we fund. When developing grant proposals, researchers must ensure generative AI tools are used responsibly and in accordance with relevant legal and ethical standards as these develop. You will be asked to declare if and how you have used any AI tools within the application form.

Our SAC and expert reviewers will not input application contents into, or use, generative AI tools in their reviews.

How applications are assessed

As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), we adhere to the Principles of Expert Review. Applications are reviewed by our Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC comprises a panel of the UK's leading neurologists, neuroscientists, and expert epilepsy researchers. The current SAC membership can be found [here](#). Shortlisted applications are also assessed by expert reviewers and people affected by epilepsy.

As funds are limited, the selection of proposals for funding is highly competitive. In assessing applications at both the preliminary and full application stage, the SAC will consider the track record of the candidate and the quality and relevance of the proposed project.

The research proposal will be assessed across the following criteria:

- Is the research question important for epilepsy research?
- Is there a clear and testable hypothesis and rationale for this study?
- Is the idea and proposed work original or has it been undertaken before?
- Is the work likely to lead to useful data about proof of concept and/or feasibility?
- Does it fill a clear gap in current knowledge of epilepsy?
- Is the work well designed (including statistical analysis)?
- Is the work proposed commensurate with the time frame of the award?
- Are the costs fully justified and appropriate?
- Does the applicant have, or could rapidly attain, the necessary skills/resources/ facilities to undertake the project?
- Is the impact to people with epilepsy clearly communicated in lay terms?
- Are Ethical and Home Office/R&D/NHS governance approvals in place (if applicable)?
- Does this application conform to the policy on the 3Rs (Reduction, Refinement, Replacement)?

Finances and costs

You should work with finance offices, clinical trials units, local NHS trusts and the local NIHR CRN network to ensure that all costs of research have been identified and appropriately costed.

As a member charity, the Epilepsy Research Institute adopts the AMRC position statement regarding full economic costing: "It is clear with regard to university funding that its members will not fund research on a percentage basis. AMRC member charities will continue to pay for the directly-incurred and identifiable costs of research (see examples below). We do not fund university indirect costs (see examples below), or other costs, such as (tenured) investigators' salaries or estate costs, identified under TRAC." The Epilepsy Research Institute will not cover the salaries of co-investigators.

Please note:

- All requested budget items must be fully justified in your application.
- Our SAC may request additional justification for some costs.
- If you believe that any of the 'unacceptable costs' should be seen as direct costs for your project, you must provide full and detailed justification for this in your application.
- We will not provide additional funding to cover increases in research costs after an award has been made. This includes, but is not limited to, increases in personnel costs, salaries, consumables, or other research-related expenses. Where salary costs are included in the budget, applicants should consult their finance department and consider including reasonable annual increases to reflect expected pay awards or inflation over the lifetime of the project.

Acceptable costs (directly incurred and identifiable costs)

- Salary costs e.g. for PhD students/post-docs and certain staff (e.g. non-tenured principal investigators, research assistants and technicians) to work full- or part-time on a project. The costs of technical staff (e.g. statisticians) spending a portion of their time directly on the project are allowed with justification.
- Identified items needed to carry out the research, such as laboratory or clinical consumables, equipment, fieldwork, animals. Inclusion of equipment costs in any application will require detailed justification and a statement regarding longer-term use. Publication of any research, whether now or in the future, which substantially relies on equipment funded as part of a grant from the Epilepsy Research Institute, must acknowledge our support accordingly.
- Reasonable travel costs directly related to the research will be considered. The Epilepsy Research Institute will only cover expenses for conferences where data directly relevant to the project is to be presented. We will cover the costs of one conference attendee but will consider increasing this to two attendees with appropriate justification. The principal investigator must inform the Epilepsy Research Institute in advance of any conferences/meetings where data related to the project is to be presented and send the Epilepsy Research Institute a copy of the presentation.
- Patient and public involvement (PPI) costs, including to cover payments and expenses for PPI members. See NIHR's guidance on budgeting for involvement - www.nihr.ac.uk/payment-guidance-researchers-and-professionals

Unacceptable costs (indirect costs)

These include advertising for posts, secretarial work, stationery, licence fees, or contribution to general departmental overheads. We expect that resources from the university block grant (quality-related funding) and the Charity Research Support Fund will be used by institutions to underpin eligible charity-funded research and cover the costs that we regard as being outside our remit.

Authorisation

The details of all projects should be discussed with the relevant financial officer and head of department at the institution where the project will be undertaken prior to submission of the application. Signatures from the financial officer and head of department are required.

Clinical research projects

Clinical research projects utilising NHS premises or staff must complete a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT). Please see guidance [here](#). Clinical studies must be costed using the [AcoRD framework](#). Applicants using AcoRD are advised to speak with the designated AcoRD specialist at the Study Support Service of their [local Clinical Research Network](#).

Use of animals

The Epilepsy Research Institute supports the [AMRC's position statement on animal research](#).

Research using animal models plays a vital role in the medical research process. As an organisation, we are committed to the 3Rs of reduction, replacement and refinement, as basic principles of humane animal research.

If your research proposal involves animals, please complete Appendix I: Experiments on animals, and submit this along with your full application (not required at preliminary application stage). This will be carefully considered by our SAC and expert reviewers.

Use of human tissue

If your research proposal includes human tissue, you must justify why, confirm that you'll comply with the appropriate legislation, and follow the relevant Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA). The type of tissue and quantity must be fully justified in your application.

4. ENHANCING YOUR APPLICATION

Patient and public involvement (PPI)

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research is when people with personal experience of health conditions work in active partnership with researchers. Involvement isn't the same as recruiting participants to your study. Or sharing information with people through public engagement events.

In your application, you will be asked to outline:

- how you have worked with people affected by epilepsy in the development of your proposal
- how you will continue to involve people affected by epilepsy, if successfully funded.

There are many ways to involve people affected by epilepsy in research, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For example, you may wish to run focus groups, set up an Advisory Group, ask for feedback on summaries and documents, or invite someone affected by epilepsy to be a co-applicant.

The Shape Network is our research-interested community of people affected by epilepsy. You can work in partnership with members of the Shape Network to plan, design, manage, evaluate, and disseminate your research. The Epilepsy Research Institute can support you with involvement activities.

Application Clinics

If your application is shortlisted, you will be invited to attend a Shape Network Application Clinic, where you will have the chance to present your proposal to members of the network and hear their feedback on your work. This will be facilitated by a member of the Epilepsy Research Institute.

Plain English summary

All applications will be appraised by members of the Shape Network, who may not have a scientific background. All applications must therefore include a plain English summary describing the background to the proposal, what the research is aiming to investigate and the specific aims of the research study, what you will do during the study to achieve these aims, as well as the significance of this research and the potential impact for people affected by epilepsy.

It is important that this summary is written in clear, easy-to-understand language. Medical terms are acceptable but should be explained. Abbreviations and/or technical vocabulary should be rewritten, and general statements about epilepsy or epilepsy research should be avoided.

The scientific professional members are recruited from a variety of backgrounds, both clinical and laboratory, and may also rely on the plain English summaries of applications not in their subject area.

A plain English summary guide can be found at: www.elsevier.com/connect/authors-update/in-a-nutshell-how-to-write-a-lay-summary.

Tips from the Scientific Advisory Committee

Professor Mike Cousin, previous Chair of the SAC, gave a talk detailing his top tips at our event. You can watch the recording on our website here: <https://epilepsy-institute.org.uk/apply-for-funding/>

Write with clarity

Keep your proposal clear and straightforward. Reviewers and committee members often assess many applications, so it's important they can quickly grasp your key ideas and aims without needing to wade through additional information or convoluted ideas.

Engage with people affected by epilepsy early

Working with people affected by epilepsy to ensure your research question is relevant and important to the community is essential.

Include enough detail about the methods you will use

Details about the methods are essential for the SAC and reviewers to assess the applications in a meaningful way. Justify your approach, outlining why the proposed tests or experiments are the most appropriate for what you are trying to achieve.

Ensure your proposal is realistic and achievable

Avoid basing your proposal on something that may not work – if there are risks, make sure to acknowledge them and build in a contingency plan to demonstrate that the project will still deliver value even if certain aspects don't go as planned. Include pilot data or support from collaborators if possible.

Tell us why your project is important to epilepsy

As an epilepsy-focused charity, the committee places strong emphasis on the relevance to epilepsy. You need to convince us that the question you're addressing is worthwhile – e.g. is it an exciting new approach, will the outcome have wider relevance?

Respond thoughtfully to reviewer's feedback

All applicants who are invited to submit a full proposal are given the opportunity to respond to the comments from their assigned external referees (who remain anonymous). This is a great opportunity to show the SAC that you have considered these comments and provide reassurance that your proposal remains sound and valid.

5. ONCE AN AWARD IS MADE

Approvals

Grant holders must provide copies of ethics committee approvals or Home Office licences relevant to their proposed project before any payment of grant monies can be made.

Commencement of work

Grant holders must notify the Epilepsy Research Institute of the actual start date of work on the grant. Work must begin within 12 months of the award notification date.

Approval for changes

Grant holders must seek prior approval from the SAC for any deviation in the research methods or planned use of funds from that described in the original application. Grant holders must also notify the Epilepsy Research Institute if a member of the research team funded by the grant leaves and supply the curriculum vitae of any new appointee.

Reporting

All grant holders are required to supply the Epilepsy Research Institute with an annual progress report and a final report. Template forms will be forwarded at the appropriate times. Failure to provide such reports may result in final grant payments being withheld and subsequent applications being reviewed less favourably. For grants lasting one year or less, only a final report will normally be required. The SAC reserves the right to request additional reports at any time if it is concerned about a grant's progress.

Grant holders will also be invited to informal check-in calls with members of the Epilepsy Research Institute's grants team, which will take place throughout the duration of the grant.

Grant outcomes

The Epilepsy Research Institute has an obligation to its donors to monitor and report on the impact of grant awards. Each year during the designated 'submission period', grant holders are required to upload all of their grant outcomes/outputs to date, via the Researchfish platform (www.researchfish.com). Core outputs include publications, further funding, public engagement activities, promotions/qualifications, new collaborations, indicators of esteem, research awards/prizes and influence on policy/procedure.

Grant holders will usually be asked to provide updates in this way for at least three years after their grant has ended. If any outcomes/outputs arise after this time, the grant holder must make the Epilepsy Research Institute aware of them as soon as possible. The Epilepsy Research Institute also reserves the right to contact grant holders periodically for informal updates on the longer-term outcomes of funding.

Acknowledgement

Grant holders are required to acknowledge the financial support of the Epilepsy Research Institute in all publications and presentations of work arising from the grant and supply the charity with evidence of this. We also request that grant holders acknowledge the Epilepsy Research Institute, as the funder of their pilot data, in all publications resulting from subsequent grants.

Grant holders should notify the Epilepsy Research Institute in advance of any publications or presentations of their funded research.

Dissemination

Grant holders are encouraged to submit an abstract from their work to the [ILAE British Branch Annual Scientific Meeting](#) at least once during their grant.