

SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION BOARD

General Guidelines for Applicants

Please read these guidelines before starting to complete your application form

Introduction

The Scientific Foundation Board was established in 1976 and reflects the College's strong commitment to research. It is currently chaired by Professor Greg Rubin. The Board includes experienced researchers and other key representatives in the field of primary care.

The Board awards grants for research relevant to general medical practice and primary care which is undertaken from a United Kingdom base and normally based on subjects within the United Kingdom. Its definition of research is catholic and includes experimental and descriptive studies, both quantitative and qualitative. It favours applications that demonstrate multi-disciplinary collaboration and/or collaboration with an academic department, where appropriate. The Board also favours applications from young and/or new researchers and those who have not previously been funded by the Board.

All applications are judged on the quality of the project. It should, however, be noted that the Board does not fund audit projects or guideline developments.

Applications (over £1,000) for grants from the Board are reviewed by its members individually and are then considered in an annual meeting of the Board as whole. The closing date for the submission of applications to be considered at the annual meeting are posted on the Clinical Innovation and Research Centre SFB webpage of the College website:

http://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical_and_research/circ/research/scientific_foundation_board.aspx

The Board administers a general fund and a number of specialist funds. However, these guidelines and the Board's application form are used for all applications irrespective of which of its funds the project is to be supported from.

Eligibility

Although it is the Scientific Foundation Board of the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Board is able to award grants to people who are not members of the College. The Board reserves the right to make appropriate awards on an individual case basis, as the prime consideration will be scientific quality, but the following are general guidelines to its usual practice:

Members of any primary care discipline are eligible to apply. For grants in excess of £1,000 the Board encourages applications which involve multi-disciplinary collaboration and collaboration with academic departments.

The Board wishes to encourage, and will give priority to, applications from young and/or relatively inexperienced researchers and to those who have not previously been funded by the Board.

The Board does **not** make awards to undergraduate students.

It is the College's policy that the same piece of work may only be used to apply for one College award **within a three year period**. Previous College award winners may, therefore, only apply for funding from the Scientific Foundation Board within this period if the subject matter for their project has been substantially developed or is significantly different from that supported by their original award. However, in special circumstances where a project which the Board has funded requires a small amount of additional money to allow its effective completion the Board may be willing to make a supplementary award to the original application. If you have any doubts concerning the eligibility of your application on these grounds you should contact the Clerk to the Board.

Priorities

In the event of applications of equal merit being received, the Board will accord the following priorities (the prime consideration is scientific quality):

- The Board will give priority to submissions from practising GPs, particularly members of the College, who must be Members in good standing.
- The Board will give priority to applications to young and/or relatively inexperienced researchers.
- The Board will give priority to applicants who have **not** previously been funded by the Board.

Grants

Priority will be given to short term projects which will normally last up to 18 months.

No awards will be made in excess of **£20,000**.

The Board will not generally fund time for individuals who are already in receipt of funding for research from another source. For example, the Board would not normally consider funding protected time for an individual working in a research practice which was in receipt of R&D support funding.

The Board might, however, consider a request for protected time from an individual currently employed solely to undertake one specific research project where such a request would enable them to undertake an additional project.

Such an application would be considered on an individual case basis. Applicants requiring locum cover will be required to provide receipts.

Guidance on costing applications

The Board is a charity and does not fund institutional overheads as part of its awards. The funding given by the Board is in respect of the direct attributable costs of the research and it will not fund accommodation, Human Resources, IT or Finance Department support, or any type of hosting fee.

Research projects carried out as part of an MSc or other higher degree may be funded, but applications should not include any elements that are normally covered by university bench fees.

The Board does not pay supervision fees.

Budgets for salaries, running costs and equipment costs should be shown separately. Applicants must ensure that costs are accurately forecasted and fully justified in their budget. Applicants are also required to ensure that appropriate arrangements have been made to enable any national pay awards or inflationary pressures occurring over the course of their project to be honoured.

The Board will examine critically all requests for office costs, including postage, stationery, photocopying, telephones, and mileage. Mileage will be paid at the prevailing standard College rate, currently 40p per mile.

Requests for payment for the transcribing of tapes will also be funded at a standard rate, to be decided from time to time by the Board. Currently the normal rate is £7 per hour (£9 within London) and payment will be limited to 6 hours work for a 1 hour tape.

All requests for equipment, including computers and software need to be convincingly justified. If applicants are based within an academic department, requests for funding for computer, software and transcription equipment costs, should be particularly well justified. The Board will not normally fund items which it considers should already be available within a department.

Normally, the Board would not expect first time researchers to employ research assistants to assist them with their study. In these instances the Board would generally expect the applicant to undertake the work themselves in order to gain first hand experience and learn where problems might lie. However, the Board will consider requests to support such staff on a case by case basis.

When funding for the provision of consultancy services is requested it should be noted that the Board will only reimburse the actual salary costs (i.e. salary plus National Insurance and Superannuation costs) of that individual.

The Board will not pay consultancy rates which include an element for institutional overheads and/or a profit element. Individuals acting as a consultant to a project are requested to confirm that they are not in receipt of any other source of income for the hours they are contributing to the project. This confirmation must be included with the application.

The Board will consider funding appropriate expenses to respondents or research subjects, provided these are fully justified and are in proportion with the scale of the study.

Time taken by NHS staff in relation to the research may be funded through NHS R&D support funding mechanisms and applicants should explore the availability of such funding.

The Board is not in a position to fund fees for educational courses or activities. However, the Board is prepared to meet 50% of conference fees and related expenses incurred through attendance at events for the purpose of disseminating the study within the United Kingdom up to a maximum one-off payment of £250.

The Board does not provide top-up funding for studies that have exceeded their budget or are already underway.

Making an application

Application forms are available on the College's website:

http://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical_and_research/circ/research/scientific_foundation_board.aspx

All applications must be made on the prescribed form and must be typed. The lengths on the pro-forma for applications should be adhered to and typed in a font size of 10 point or larger.

It is essential that the appropriate signatures and statements are obtained i.e. from your adviser/supervisor (this is the person shown on Page 10 of the application form as having advised you on study design), and those relating to your research sponsor. The signature and statement from your adviser/supervisor is required as a means of ensuring that he/she has read though your application, can confirm that you have received and incorporated the relevant advice and are satisfied that your application is ready to go forward for consideration by the Board. This is an important requirement for new or relatively inexperienced researchers who do not have the skill range of more experienced researchers and it will lessen the likelihood of the Board either requiring changes to the application before agreeing to fund a study or of rejecting an application because, for example, of major flaws in the study design.

For requests for grants in excess of £1,000 applicants are required to submit 14 hard copies and one electronic copy of the application and their CV, (12 for the Board members, 1 for the Clerk/File, 1 spare copy).

If a grant of £1,000 or less is being sought one hard copy and one electronic copy of the application and CV are required.

If the application refers to an unpublished instrument, the requisite number of copies (see above) should accompany the application.

Applications and any additional papers should be submitted to the Clerk to the Board by the deadline.

Practitioners Allowance Grant applications

Chairman's action can be taken between meetings to approve the Practitioners Allowance Grant, of up to £1,000. This is available by application to clinicians who face difficulties in acquiring direct costs for a specific research activity within their practice. Work for which support is requested under this procedure should not include costs which the applicant's parent institution might reasonably be expected to meet as a matter of routine (e.g. requests for funding for small amounts of postage or photocopying). Projects for which support is requested under this small grant procedure will normally be expected to have the potential to be generalisable.

If you wish to apply for a grant under Chairman's action, you should submit to the Chairman, Professor Greg Rubin (at the Clinical Innovation & Research Centre of the College, 2nd floor, room 2.08, 31 Southampton Row, London WC1B 5HJ) one hard copy of your application with the appropriate signatures, and also **email** a copy of your application and any relevant additional papers to circ@rcgp.org.uk.

Research Governance and Ethical approval

All applicants must conduct any research to be funded by the Scientific Foundation Board in line with the provisions of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care and, where relevant, the EU Clinical Trials Directive which applies to all trials on human subjects involving medicinal products. The Board will not release any grants awarded until applicants have submitted to the Clerk to the Board a copy of the letter from the relevant research ethics committee confirming ethical approval or have provided a clear explanation of why such approval is not necessary. Applicants will also need to state who will be acting as the research sponsor for the study as the Board does not have the resources to enable it to assume the role of research sponsor. If you are uncertain as to who, in your locality, is able to take on the role of research sponsor you should consult your adviser/supervisor, local academic department, primary care research network or local primary care organisation.

Useful sites for more information on research governance and the EU Clinical Trials Directive are:

Research Governance

England

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchAndDevelopmentAZ/ResearchGovernance/fs/en>

Scotland

<http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/cso/>

Wales

<http://www.word.wales.gov.uk/content/governance/governance-e.htm>

Northern Ireland

http://www.centuralservicesagency.com/display/rdo_research_governance_frame

Ethical Approval

Central Office for Research Ethics Committees

<http://www.corec.org.uk/>

EU Clinical Trials Directive

<http://medicines.mhra.gov.uk/ourwork/licensingmeds/types/clintrialdir.htm>

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Where the proposed study involves NHS patients, staff or resources, appropriate ethical approval and local research governance approval must be obtained. It is essential to ensure that strict confidentiality is maintained and that an assurance is given to participants that this will be done. This will, in any case, be required by all Research Ethics Committees.

If a study will use personal data on an individual who can be identified, these data may be subject to the Data Protection Act 1998. It is the applicant's personal responsibility to ensure that the provisions of the act are met. Further information on the act may be obtained from the Data Protection Registrar, Springfield House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AX.

Advice

Studies which do not, in the opinion of the Board, offer a reasonable chance of meeting their stated objectives will be rejected. In the absence of any previous research experience, applicants are expected to seek advice on the design of the protocol before making an application. If the application relates to a quantitative study, the Board will expect applicants to have sought statistical advice when preparing their application and for information relating to this to be included in the application.

Some advice which may be helpful, particularly for inexperienced applicants, is set out at the end of this document. Advice may be obtained from the Board and, in the first instance, an approach should be made to the Clerk.

If required, continuing advice may be sought from the Board by successful applicants throughout the course of their project.

Funding decisions

The Board will normally notify all applicants within 4 - 8 weeks of their meeting whether or not their application has been successful.

The outcome of the Board's consideration of applications will normally take one of the following forms:

- The Board may approve an application as it stands.
- The Board may approve an application as it stands and make some suggestions which the applicant may wish to bear in mind, but the award of the grant will not be dependent on these being adopted.
- The Board may agree to approve an application subject to issues on its content being satisfactorily resolved after which the grant will be released.

- The Board may decide to invite a revised application. In which case the revised application should be prepared using Track Changes or similar so Board members can see where the original application has been changed. The Board will not normally consider a revised application unless one has specifically been requested.
- The Board may decide not to approve an application e.g. the study falls outside its funding remit, the methodology is inappropriate, the outcome is unlikely to meet the study's objectives.

The Chairman will normally notify applicants who have submitted applications for consideration under the Chairman's action procedure within one month whether or not their application has been successful.

Successful applicants are required to commence taking up their award within 6 months of it being awarded. Should it appear that this will not be possible, the grant holder should contact the Honorary Secretary to the Board as soon as possible to seek an extension.

Final reports

Successful applicants are required to submit a report in line with the Board's proforma at the conclusion of their project. This must follow the Board's format. This report should include details of any published material resulting from the project.

The final report should be submitted within 12 months of the expected end date of the project. If it appears that it will be difficult to meet this deadline, the Honorary Secretary should be contacted as soon as possible to seek an extension.

Applicants whose projects last in excess of 12 months will be required to submit an interim report at the end of the first 12 months, which includes a copy of the annual progress report sent to the ethics committee or using the Board's interim report format if ethical approval was not required for the study. Failure to submit an interim report within 3 months of its due date will result in no further funds being released to the grant holder until it is submitted.

It is the Board's policy not to grant new awards to any applicant whose final report from a previously funded project is still outstanding after the 12 month deadline.

Recipients of awards are required to acknowledge receipt of this funding in any publications resulting from projects funded by the Scientific Foundation Board. The following sentence should be included: "This study was funded by the Scientific Foundation Board of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Grant No. xxxx"

ADVICE FOR APPLICANTS

Common reasons for rejection of applications

Although not intended as a comprehensive guide, the Board suggests that particular attention is paid to the following matters, which are common reasons for rejection of applications.

Research questions and associated hypotheses:

The question or aim of the project should be clearly defined. A good idea is likely to be funded in the end even if modifications are required in the design or execution of the project. In general, the research question(s) should be clearly stated as testable hypotheses if the study is an experimental one. In some kinds of study design (e.g. descriptive studies), hypothesis setting may NOT be appropriate. Applicants should also provide evidence of a thorough review of the literature. The Board may be prepared to consider funding a literature search as an independent project.

Definition of terms:

The factors (variables) which are to be studied must be carefully defined and, if applicable, you must show how you will measure them. If you are measuring outcomes (e.g. of a treatment or intervention) these must also be rigorously defined. It may be necessary to conduct preliminary work in order to define terms or devise or test methods of measurement. In that case an explicit application can be made to the Board for funding of preliminary work.

Instruments:

The means by which you will obtain data should usually have been well validated, unless your application is for the construction or testing of a new instrument. This applies particularly to the use of questionnaires, especially where these are scaled to produce scores. Construction and validation of a new instrument of this kind is likely to be beyond the ability and resources of a novice applicant. It is almost always necessary to use an existing well validated instrument even if this is not exactly suitable. Copies of any novel questionnaires and other instruments should be attached to the application.

Design:

The Board expects that your study will produce an answer to the research question that you pose or meet the aim of your study. The main element here is an appropriate design. A good introductory text should be used to familiarise yourself with the various possible kinds of design and their respective advantages and disadvantages, before you seek expert advice. Where qualitative techniques (e.g. interviews) are to be used, the applicant should demonstrate familiarity with the rigorous application of these methods (see book list) and should usually have sought appropriate advice and supervision.

Sampling:

The methods needed to draw samples may be more complex than might be thought and expert advice is again strongly advised. If the research is to be applicable and relevant to the group from which it is drawn (study population) a properly drawn random sample is usually the best method.

It is not, however, always necessary or even desirable that samples should be randomly drawn, particularly in qualitative research. Where the intention of the study is to detect a clinically meaningful effect (in, say, a treatment or other intervention) expert help should again be obtained to calculate the necessary sample size (statistical power).

SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION BOARD

Membership

Professor Greg Rubin (*Chairman*)

Professor Helen Lester (*Honorary Secretary*)

Dr Colin Hunter OBE (*Honorary Treasurer*)

Prof Ann Crosland

Prof Frank Dobbs

Prof Elaine McColl

Prof Andrew Wilson

Prof Sue Wilson

Prof Bruce Guthrie

Mrs Sally Kerry, Honorary Consultant Statistician to the Board