

# Drug accelerator awards

## Information for applicants

**PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>**  
**CHANGE ATTITUDES.**  
**FIND A CURE.**  
**JOIN US.**

Parkinson's UK is the largest member-led charitable funder of Parkinson's research in Europe. So far, we've invested over £100 million in ground-breaking research.

### Purpose and scope

The aim of this new grant programme is to accelerate the development of novel drugs for the treatment of Parkinson's. This funding will help teams generate the essential data needed to get their novel drug ready to enter a full scale drug discovery programme. This could be a development pipeline run by the biotech, pharmaceutical industry or other funding agencies such as the Parkinson's Virtual Biotech programme.

We're looking to attract applications from pioneering scientists from UK academic centres or small biotechs with exciting new ideas for developing drugs, who need further funding and technical assistance from our drug discovery team to develop their ideas. This new funding scheme will help bridge the gaps in their data package and accelerate the transition into a full drug development programme.

- The duration of a Drug Accelerator Award is for a maximum of 12 months.
- There will be two grant rounds a year
- There is no minimum value for the Drug Accelerator Award, however, the maximum cost of applications is up to £100,000.
- For projects involving *in vivo* work, a duration of 12 to 18 months and an award amount of up to £150,000 will be considered.
- If you have any queries on making an application in this area, please contact the team on [researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk).

### Eligibility

- Grants are tenable for academics based at a UK university, NHS trust, or other UK research institution or small biotech (which may be based outside the UK).
- The principal applicant must have a permanent contract (honorary contract for clinicians) within their institution or a senior position in a biotech to be able to submit an application.
- Applicants may be new to Parkinson's research, but must have relevant Parkinson's experience within the proposed project team.
- Co-applicants and collaborators may be based at institutions outside the UK and / or at pharmaceutical or biotech companies. There is no upper limit to the number of co-applicants / collaborators that can be added to an application.
- Applicants should read the relevant documents before completing the application form:
  - [Drug Accelerator Award grant academic terms and conditions](#)
  - [Drug Accelerator Award grant commercial terms and conditions](#)
  - [Drug Accelerator Award grant cost guidance](#)

### Application scope and eligibility

Laboratory work can run in academic laboratories with a strong track record in the proposed techniques or at contract research organisations. This is not an exhaustive list but if you are unsure whether your project is suitable for the grant call contact: [researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk)

**Eligible projects** could consist of the following approaches or combination of approaches:

- Generation of target engagement and neuroprotection efficacy data in highly characterised relevant *in vitro* models of Parkinson's, particularly patient derived cell lines.
- *In vitro* mechanistic studies to validate mechanism of action, for example utilising target knock-out/knock-down approaches.
- Generation of target engagement and neuroprotection efficacy data in highly characterised relevant *in vivo* models of Parkinson's, particularly alpha-synuclein based models.
- Replication of key datasets in independent research facilities to support the robustness of the drug approach.
- Rodent *in vivo* pharmacokinetic studies to generate data on the ability of the test compound to penetrate into the brain in sufficient concentrations for target engagement and its metabolic fate.
- Off target safety screening.
- Further development of existing assays to show their suitability for a screening programme.
- *In vitro* profiling of existing compounds to show scope for further optimisation.

#### Examples of ineligible projects:

- Development of biologics.
- Development of novel drug delivery approaches.
- Repurposing of existing drugs
- Reformulation of existing drugs
- Preclinical development studies to initiate clinical trials (e.g. bulk synthesis/manufacture to GMP, toxicology etc.).

#### Application procedure

- All applications must be made in English.
- Applications will be submitted via a 2 stage process, with a pre-proposal and a full application stage  
Applications will be reviewed on 4 key criteria:
  - importance and relevance of the research to people living with Parkinson's
  - preliminary evidence of validation of drug target for Parkinson's
  - pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy
  - a clear plan for the commercial development of the drug if the research is successful
- Closing dates for pre-proposal and full proposals can be found on [Parkinson's UK website](#). Deadlines may be subject to change. Any changes will be shared widely via the charity website and relevant newsletters.
- The full proposal stage is by invitation only for those applicants who have passed scientific review at the pre-proposal stage.
- The pre-proposal application form can be requested by contacting [researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk).
- Applicants will receive a confirmatory email from the Research Grants team at Parkinson's UK when a pre-proposal has been received.
- Full grant applications to Parkinson's UK are made through the charity's [online grant application system](#). Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.
- Applicants will receive confirmation by email from [researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk) once a full grant application is submitted.
- Applicants are not required to submit a hard copy application.
- Details of any collaboration should be included and a letter confirming agreement from each collaborator should be submitted.
- Any relevant 'in press' articles should be attached as appendices.
- Unless the charity requires further information, no correspondence will be entered into until the results are notified. Applicants are requested not to initiate contact with the Research team during the review process.
- Please include the relevant information for your plain English summary including a lay abstract, project background and impact. Please ensure that the potential benefits and timescales for when the proposed research may benefit people affected by Parkinson's are realistic and not overinflated.
- The scientific research proposal should include the following information: background and plan of investigation which should explicitly cover study design, methods of data collection analysis and time schedule.

## Costing the application

- Applicants must justify the funds requested.
- The research budget in the pre-proposal should be realistic and be within  $\pm 10\%$  of the allowable costing in the full application. Please note, costings at this stage do not need formal institutional/company approval.
- Applicants who are successful at the pre-proposal stage will be invited to submit a full application.
- Applicants must apply for funding in British pounds sterling.
- Applicants should seek the advice of their institution's/company Finance or Research Office on costing the application well in advance of the application deadline. Online submissions of the application are sent directly to Parkinson's UK.
- In line with the Association of Medical Research Charities guidelines, Parkinson's UK will only reimburse directly incurred research costs for awarded grants as per the application submitted. **Please read our [guidance on research costs](#).**
- **Staff costs:** Basic salary should be stated for each individual. Provision for London weighting, superannuation and National Insurance should be shown separately in the space provided. An appropriate grading and salary must be quoted even where a named assistant cannot be specified; both grading and salary should have the approval of the appropriate administrative officer of the institution where the assistant would be employed.
- **Research expenses:** Details must be given.
- **Open Access Publications:** Costs related to open access publishing may be included. Please see our guidance on [open access publishing](#). The costs requested must be fully justified.
- **Equipment:** Please specify each piece of equipment requested.
- You may include costs for any planned patient and public involvement (PPI) activities in your application, for example travel expenses for a face-to-face meeting.

## Review procedure

- Pre-proposals will be reviewed and triaged by an in-house panel of experts.
- Full applications will be reviewed by a grants panel of industrial, academic, Parkinson's UK experts and people affected by Parkinson's. The panel will make recommendations for funding to the charity.
- All applications are reviewed using a ten point system, with 0=Unfundable and 10=Highly fundable/Highly competitive at International Standard. **(see Appendix)**
- Applicants submitting pre-proposals with substantive scientific merit and deemed likely to have a meaningful and translatable impact on the lives of people affected by Parkinson's, will receive an e-mail notification inviting them to submit a full application.
- Applicants submitting pre-proposals which lack scientific merit, are out of scope and or lack potential impact for people affected by Parkinson's, will receive an email stating they are not being invited to submit a full proposal and a brief statement why they have been unsuccessful at this stage.
- For full applications, the mean review scores from the grants panel will be used to identify a small shortlist of highly ranked applications for discussion at the panel meeting.
- Unsuccessful applicants at the full application stage will receive brief feedback from the grants panel as to why they were unsuccessful..
- Successful applicants will be given feedback from the panel meeting and the opportunity to respond and develop areas of the application, with input from appropriate experts as necessary. Funding may be awarded on the condition that particular areas of the application are developed as suggested by the funding panel.
- Successful applicants (grantholders) will submit a short progress report at six months and a final report upon completion of the project, detailing results of the research against project milestones as per the Parkinson's UK research grants terms and conditions. Reports will be reviewed by an in-house panel of experts. Comments will be fed back to the grantholder who will be required to respond to them and make amendments to the study as appropriate. Grantholders may also be asked to attend a virtual meeting at this stage to discuss progress.
- Applications will be judged by the grants panel members against the following criteria:
  - importance and relevance of the research to people living with Parkinson's
  - preliminary evidence of validation of drug target for Parkinson's
  - robust pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy
  - scientific quality of the proposal

- clear plan for the commercial development of the drug if the research is successful
  - quality of the researcher and team
  - value for money
  - budget and infrastructure
- A good plain English summary is essential to communicate the project to external audiences and to the people affected by Parkinson's who will be reviewing applications and sitting on the panel.. It should contain the following criteria:
    - the importance and relevance of the research for people affected by Parkinson's
    - the potential benefit of the research for people affected by Parkinson's
    - potential benefits and timescales must be realistic and not overinflated.

If you have further questions about making an application, please contact the Research team.

**Email:** [researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:researchapplications@parkinsons.org.uk)

# Writing a research grant application

We only fund the best quality research so that every penny donated towards research will benefit people with Parkinson's. We receive a high volume of applications in each grant round, so it's vital that you make your application stand out from the crowd. Below are some tips and pitfalls to avoid when writing your grant application to give yourself the best chance of success.

## Make a good first impression

- Read the 'Information for applicants' document for the appropriate grant scheme.
- Read the Parkinson's UK research grant terms and conditions and costs guidance – make sure your requests are allowable by Parkinson's UK.
- Give all the information required in the correct format - Arial typescript, size 11pt.
- Ensure that your application undergoes an internal peer review process at your institution, to gain feedback on the scientific quality of the proposed study, and ensure proof reading has identified typographical and grammatical errors.
- Ensure figures make sense and are correctly referenced in the text.
- Make sure everything in your research proposal is correctly referenced.
- Even if your ideas are excellent, a badly presented application may make reviewers wonder if this is an indication of how the research will be conducted.

## Write a good plain English summary

- The plain English summary must accurately reflect the research proposal and scientific abstract. Applicants should be realistic about the potential outcomes of their research and the likely timescales involved.
  - Avoid using jargon, abbreviations and technical terms wherever possible – if you have to use them provide a clear explanation.
  - Include a good glossary.
  - Avoid complicated English or uncommon words.
  - Avoid elaborate explanations of 'what is Parkinson's'. They are very likely to know a lot about this and want to know about the particular research project.
  - Use active not passive phrases, for example say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.
  - Keep sentences short - try not to use more than 15 to 20 words per sentence.
  - Break up the text, for example by using bullet point lists.
  - If your study involves participants ensure you have included details of what will be involved for them and how they will be supported.
- You can find more tips on writing a good plain English summary on the [Make it Clear campaign website](#).

## Clearly demonstrate how your research relates to Parkinson's

- Parkinson's UK only supports research into Parkinson's and Parkinsonisms e.g. MSA, PSP. We want to fund research that has the greatest chance of improving the lives of people with Parkinson's.
- Peer reviewers have a lot of knowledge of Parkinson's and will usually have considered many applications over the years. They expect applicants to demonstrate a good understanding of Parkinson's. Applicants whose expertise and publications record primarily relates to another field should seek to collaborate with relevant experts in Parkinson's and people affected by Parkinson's where necessary.

## Ensure your research proposal is clear and logical

- Make sure your hypotheses are clear and firm and are reflected clearly in the methodology.
- Show how the various experiments and stages of proposed research relate to each other.
- Give clear information on what the outcome measures will be.
- Identify and address any potential challenges or pitfalls – what will you do if your first proposed experiment doesn't result in the outcome you expected?
- Provide sufficient detail on the experiments and how they will be carried out to show your understanding of what you're doing.

- Give realistic sample sizes and power calculations based on evidence.
- **Clearly describe the future clinical benefits and timescales of practical improvements that could result from the research.**
- Ensure your application includes details of how the results of your research will be made available to others.

## Parkinson's UK Drug Accelerator Award panel scoring system

| Funding category  | Characteristics for Panel Members  | Rating scale                         |           |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Highly fundable</b></p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Well characterised drug target likely to translate to a therapy which will markedly improve QoL of people with Parkinson's.</li> <li>● Convincing pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy.</li> <li>● Excellent and appropriate methods and milestone driven research design.</li> <li>● A robust plan for the commercial development</li> <li>● Very strong, internationally competitive team, containing all relevant disciplines.</li> <li>● Very good value for money.</li> <li>● Clear and well written proposal.</li> <li>● Plain English summary accurately reflects the research proposal and is realistic about potential outcomes and timescales involved.</li> </ul> | Exceptional                          | <b>10</b> |
|   |  | Excellent quality research           | <b>9</b>  |
|   |  | Very good, bordering on excellent    | <b>8</b>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Potentially fundable</b></p>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Partially characterised drug target.</li> <li>● Partial pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy.</li> <li>● Good quality and appropriate methods and milestone driven research design.</li> <li>● A partially formed plan for the commercial development.</li> <li>● Competent and appropriate research team containing all key disciplines.</li> <li>● Good value for money.</li> <li>● All key aspects of application are clearly presented</li> <li>● Plain English summary accurately reflects the research proposal and is realistic about potential outcomes and timescales involved.</li> </ul>  | Good quality research                | <b>7</b>  |
|   |  | Above average quality research       | <b>6</b>  |
|   |  | Acceptable quality                   | <b>5</b>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Not fundable</b></p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Poorly characterised drug target.</li> <li>● Poor pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy.</li> <li>● Inappropriate plan for the commercial development.</li> <li>● Inappropriate methods and research design of only modest or poor quality.</li> <li>● Applicants without relevant research experience or key disciplines not represented.</li> <li>● Poor value for money.</li> <li>● Key elements of the application are unclear.</li> <li>● Plain English summary is unclear, does not accurately reflect the research proposal</li> </ul>   | Borderline quality research          | <b>4</b>  |
|   |  | Below acceptable quality             | <b>3</b>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Definitely not fundable</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Irrelevant drug target.</li> <li>● Lacking pilot data demonstrating target engagement/efficacy.</li> <li>● No plans for commercialisation</li> <li>● Poor/flawed/duplicative methods and research design.</li> <li>● Key skills missing from the research team.</li> <li>● Very poor value for money.</li> <li>● Unclear application.</li> <li>● Plain English summary is unclear, does not accurately reflect the research proposal</li> </ul>   | Many identified flaws                | <b>2</b>  |
|   |  | Serious weaknesses or major concerns | <b>1</b>  |