2026 project grants: call for applications

Preliminary application stage

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 12 noon on Friday 04 September 2026

We are inviting preliminary project grant applications under our three priority themes: **headache and facial pain, neuro-oncology,** and **acquired brain and spinal cord injury.**

We will fund two kinds of projects:

- **hypothesis-driven** pre-clinical or clinical research that addresses a large unmet need and demonstrates a clear pathway to clinical impact in one of these three priority areas. These projects must have a mechanistic hypothesis and a clear pathway to translation.

Or

- the development of **biological models of disease** that enhance the three priority themes and facilitate translation. Models may be *in vivo* or *in vitro* (including 3D models) and must support the future testing of a mechanistic hypothesis.

The maximum grant size is £400,000, for projects of up to three years' duration. Requests for the support of pilot studies (with correspondingly smaller budget) are encouraged.

Priority themes

We will accept applications under our three priority themes:

1. **Headache and facial pain.** We want to fund research that aims to improve the management and treatment of headache or facial pain disorders. *Within this remit, we will only fund research that addresses the fundamental causes and mechanisms of headache and facial pain.*

2. **Neuro-oncology.** We want to fund research that aims to improve clinical outcomes for patients with primary tumours of the brain or spinal cord. *Within this remit, we will only fund research that addresses the fundamental causes and mechanisms of primary tumours of the brain or spinal cord and associated neurological complications.*

3. **Acquired brain and spinal cord injury.** We want to fund research that aims to protect or restore function in patients following brain or spinal cord injury. *Within this remit, we will only fund research that addresses the mechanisms of the injury, the mechanisms of the recovery process, and determinants of outcome.*

What costs can be funded?

We provide funds for the employment of suitably qualified research staff and directly incurred research costs, with an upper limit of £400,000. Requests for the support of pilot studies (with correspondingly smaller budget) are welcomed.

PhD students may be funded if they are key to delivery of the project but PhD projects *per se* should not be submitted under this call; PhD students must not be the primary or only person working on the project.

In the case of international collaborations, we expect the funds to be spent *predominantly* in

the UK. Please contact us if you require more guidance on this.

We do not ask for detailed costings at this stage; just an estimated cost and an outline of the main items of expenditure. Detailed costings will be required at the next stage, if your application is short-listed.

Exclusions

- We will not fund the salary of the Lead applicant, who should have their salary already in place for the duration of the project.
- Capital funding for the purchase of equipment is limited to £20,000 in total.
- We will only fund **directly incurred research costs**. We will not contribute towards the cost of tenured posts, nor will we contribute towards institutional overhead costs such as rent, general utilities, estates, general administrative or secretarial costs. As a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities, Brain Research UK meets the qualifying criteria for HEFCE's Charity Research Support Funds, through which you may be able to recoup some of the full economic costs of the research.
- PPI costs should generally not be included; please contact us to discuss.
- We do not fund open access costs for publications.

Clinical research – NHS support

For clinical research taking place in England, Brain Research UK is an NIHR RD Non-commercial Partner, meaning that appropriate research studies funded through this project grant call are eligible for NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN) support and therefore entitled to access NHS support via the NIHR Research Delivery Network.

For clinical research taking place in Scotland, Brain Research UK is on the Chief Scientist Office eligible funder list.

Please get in touch if you propose to carry out clinical research in Wales or Northern Ireland.

Who may apply?

- Proposals must be submitted by a PI employed by a UK academic institution.
- We will accept only one application from any one PI in any one funding round.
- Those already in receipt of Brain Research UK project grant funding may apply **only** where existing funding will finish by 31 March 2027.
- Resubmission:
    - Resubmission of applications that were previously unsuccessful at either Stage 1 (preliminary) or Stage 2 (full submission) is permitted **only** when an applicant has been explicitly invited to resubmit by Brain Research UK as part of the formal feedback on the previously unsuccessful application.
    - In all permissible cases the applicant must explain how the project has been updated since the previous submission and demonstrate that they have addressed any feedback received.
    - Un-invited resubmissions will be rejected at initial eligibility assessment.
- We strongly encourage collaborative projects, including international collaborations, as long as they are led by a UK team and the funds will be spent predominantly in the UK. In the event

that a grant is awarded to such a collaboration, the Host institution must take overall responsibility for management of the project and must undertake to administer the funding.

- We particularly encourage applications from **early career researchers** – defined as those with up to 10 years of post-doctoral research (at 31 March 2027). Periods of extended leave may be deducted (including family and medical leave). Early career applicants should have their own salary already in place (as should all Lead applicants).

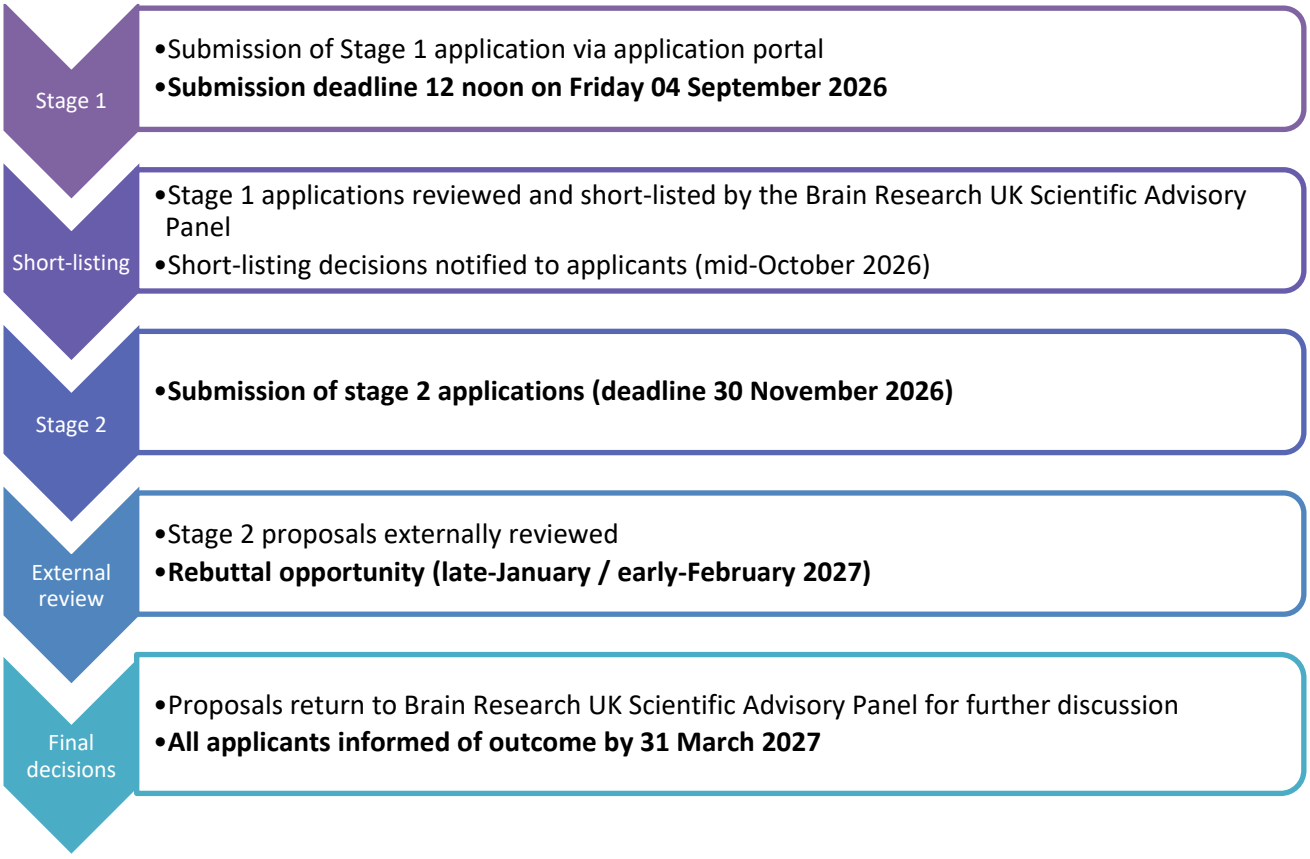
Application process and timetable

The preliminary application stage involves submission of an outline research proposal, see below.

Proposals will be reviewed and short-listed by the members of our Scientific Advisory Panel. Short-listing decisions will be based on judgements on:

- how well the project aligns with our remit;
- the perceived need that the project is addressing;
- the potential impact of the project; and
- the feasibility of the project, including the capacity of the research team to successfully carry out the research.

Short-listed applicants will be invited to submit a detailed proposal for full review.



Guidelines for completion of stage 1 project grant application

Applications must be submitted via our application portal. To access the application form, you first need to register on the portal.

When browsing the application form, there are some conditional fields that will only appear when certain options are checked, e.g. in relation to Project type and Early career researchers.

The Submit button will only appear once all sections are complete.

Section 1: Applicant information

Lead applicant: the Lead applicant must be employed by the Host Institute, which must be in the UK. They will have lead responsibility for managing the project and will be our named point of contact for all correspondence in relation to this application. In the event that funding is awarded, the Lead applicant will be responsible for managing the project and the grant.

The Lead applicant cannot apply for their own salary, and must have their own salary already in place for the duration of the project.

The **Lead applicant details** will populate automatically; if you need to change them, you can do so via **My contact details** on the left-hand menu.

Host institute: the Host institute details will populate automatically from your contact information.

Early career researchers: our definition of early career includes those with up to 10 years of post-doctoral research (at 31 March 2027). Periods of extended leave (including family and medical leave) may be deducted.

Early career applicants must demonstrate that effective mentorship is in place; there is space for you to include a statement on mentorship arrangements.

CV upload: please upload a copy of your short (**two-page**) CV. Do not upload any other documents unless you have discussed this with us in advance. Letters of support are **NOT** required from Co-applicants or Collaborators at this stage.

Section 2: Co-applicants and collaborators

Please list Co-applicants and Collaborators in the format shown.

Co-applicants are those with a central role in the proposed project, whereas **Collaborators** have a more peripheral role – such as contribution of samples, data or specific expertise in relation to discrete parts of the project. Co-applicants and Collaborators may be in the UK or abroad.

Letters of support are **not** required at the preliminary stage, but will be requested at the next stage, if short-listed.

Section 3: Research proposal

Priority area: We only accept applications within the three specific priority areas outlined above.

Project duration: Our project grants provide funding for defined projects lasting **up to 36 months.**

Estimated cost and Cost justification (max 50 words): Provide an estimated cost for the proposed research, and then briefly outline the main items of expenditure. A detailed budget will be required at the next stage, if short-listed. *Our maximum award is £400,000. Please refer to the notes on page 1 above for information on permitted costs.*

Project type: Indicate whether your proposal is for a Hypothesis-driven project OR for the Development of a model, and then provide the requested information on either:

Hypothesis/es (max 100 words): Please clearly state your hypothesis/es, which must be mechanistic. Please do not include any additional information; context can be added in the Project overview, below.

Model development (max 100 words): For projects focused on the development of models, a hypothesis is not required. Instead, you should briefly describe your proposed new model, explaining how it improves on current models and what questions/hypotheses it can address that current models cannot.

Project overview (max 750 words): Please use the space provided to make the case for your project, including relevance and feasibility.

- You should set out a clear rationale for the proposed work, provide solid preliminary data where possible, set out a clear pathway to clinical translation, and demonstrate appropriate power.
- Where you are using an existing model of disease you must explicitly justify your choice of model.
- For projects focused on the development of models, you should explain how the new model will be validated, how it will facilitate translation, and provide illustrations/ examples of future use.
- You are advised to address need and potential impact, and to explain why you and your team are well-placed to carry out this research.
- You will increase your chance of being short-listed if:
  - Your application is well-written and clearly presented, and focuses on a discrete project with a clear hypothesis (where applicable) and aims, and evidence of supporting preliminary data
  - You justify the need for the research, scientifically and clinically
  - You demonstrate a track record in the techniques involved, and include appropriately qualified/experienced co-applicants/collaborators to complement your own expertise

Previous submission (max 200 words): Resubmission is permitted **only** when an applicant has been explicitly invited to resubmit by Brain Research UK (see guidance above). In such cases, please explain how the project has been updated since the previous submission and how you have addressed any feedback received. Un-invited resubmissions will be rejected.

Appendix: You may upload a **single page** Appendix with tables and figures containing key supporting data. Please keep legends to a minimum, do not use them as an overflow for additional text. Your file should be a Word or pdf document, which should be named using the following format: last three digits of application reference followed by your surname followed by Appendix, e.g., '*059 Smith Appendix'.*

Section 4: Applicant declaration

Please check the box to indicate that you accept and agree with the Declaration. Please make sure that you have read the terms and conditions of funding.

Submitting your application

The submission deadline is **12 noon on Friday 04 September 2026.** No extensions will be permitted.

The Submit button will appear once all sections are complete. You will be asked to confirm that you wish to Submit.

You will receive an automatic acknowledgement email; please check your Spam if you don't see it within a few minutes.

We will get in touch if we have any queries about your application, otherwise it will proceed for panel review and we will be in touch in mid-October 2026 to let you know whether your proposal has been shortlisted.

Queries

Please email Dr Tom Simpson via tom.simpson@brainresearchuk.org.uk